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THE
CHURCH MEMBER'S
GUIDE
BY
J. A. JAMES

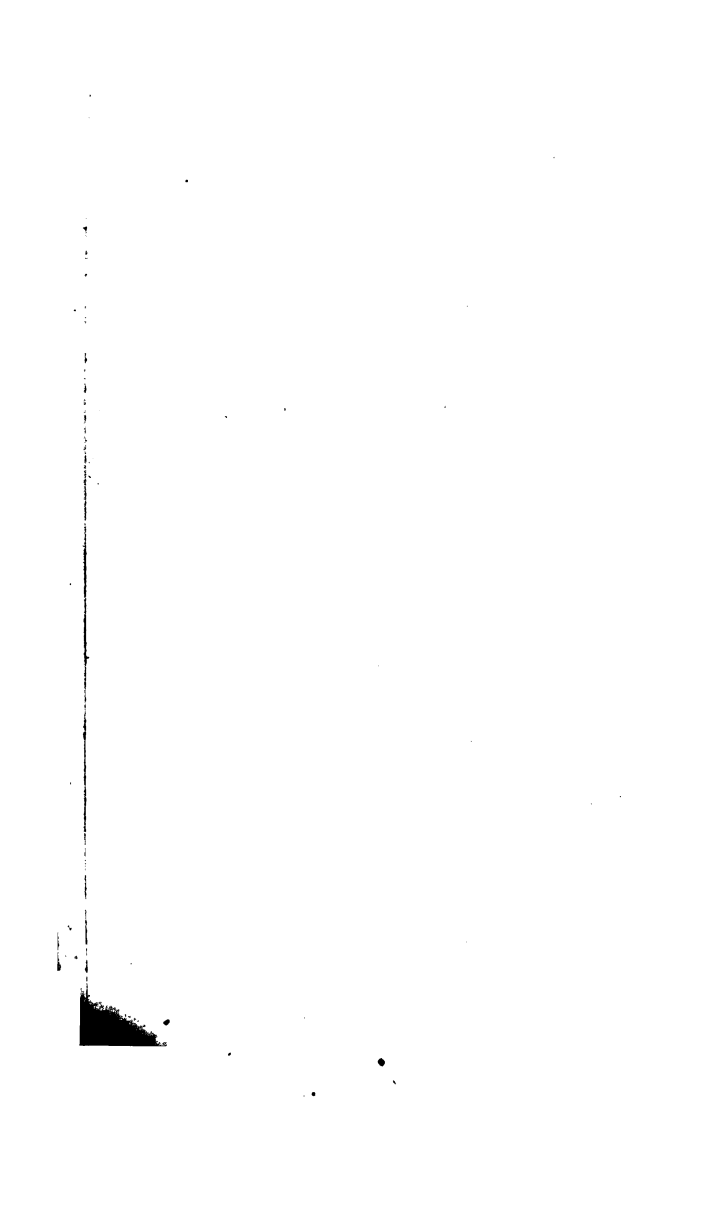
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CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP,
OR THE
CHURCH MEMBER'S GUIDE,

BY
JOHN ANGELL JAMES.

Ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Walk in love.—St. PAUL.
Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with
humility.—St. PETER.

ELEVENTH EDITION.

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P R E F A C E

TO

T H E E L E V E N T H E D I T I O N .

TO THE PASTORS OF THE CHURCHES.

Beloved and Honoured Brethren,

I dedicate the new edition of the Church Member's Guide to you, as well as to your flocks, with the earnest hope that through your recommendation it may find favour with them, and be of some little service in aiding them to carry out the design of christian fellowship, and to adorn the "doctrine of God their Saviour in all things." I am jealous for the honour of the christian name and the credit of our holy religion, both of which are so deeply involved in the conduct of our church members.

We profess to be attached to our Congregational polity, because of its obvious tendency to promote purity of ecclesiastical communion. Let us take heed, by looking well to the spiritual condition of our churches, that this be not a vain boast. I believe that if our forefathers made the door of entrance to christian fellowship too narrow, we have passed to the other extreme and made it too wide. I am entirely convinced that none of us take sufficient pains to prepare our converts for membership. Profession is by many assumed

under our sanction, upon insufficient evidence of conversion, and without their being adequately instructed by us in the doctrines of the gospel and the duties of the christian life. We might perhaps learn a lesson in this matter from the pains taken by some devoted evangelical clergymen in preparing their young people for Confirmation.

Notwithstanding our principles and our advantages for such a purpose, the ends and benefits of fellowship are but imperfectly accomplished amongst us. Hence our churches are in a much less holy and spiritual condition than could be desired. I think far more efforts should be made for our members, to promote their knowledge, faith, holiness, peace, and usefulness, both before and after their admission, than is customary amongst us. They are hurried too soon and in too unprepared a state into a profession, before they know its nature or its obligations.

It is common to measure a minister's usefulness by the number of additions to his church : and this *ought* to be a correct estimate. But is it? I fear not, for some men's measure of fitness is very low. I am aware it will be said that the apostolic example on the day of Pentecost seems to contravene all I have said about *training* for church communion. Their circumstances, however, and ours, are so different as to afford no ground for exact imitation. If they did, we ought to admit much more rapidly than we already do. Let it be understood, I am not for placing a candidate upon a long term of trial, a kind of apprenticeship to the church; all I contend for is satisfactory evidence of conversion, a tolerably competent knowledge of the way of salvation, an acquaintance with the first principles of our ecclesiastical polity, and an impressive sense of the nature and obligation of the christian profession. Ought our members to have *less* preparation for church fellowship than this? For it is to be recollected that with us, joining the church means much more than *merely* receiving the Lord's supper. It is coming into *a fellowship* for edification and government.

I am entirely satisfied that in this age, perhaps it has been so in every age, the duties of the pastorate are sadly neglected. We but imperfectly act up to our character as **SHEPHERDS**. We *feed* the flock, I hope, by divine truth in our sermons, but we fall short of our character as **BISHOPS**, i.e., overseers. Our members being once brought into the church, are left too much to themselves, as if we and they had done all when *this* is done. My colleague adopted a plan lately, which I thought a very good one;—he called a meeting at the close of the year of all the members who had been added during its progress, and addressed them appropriately to their circumstances.

In looking back upon the ministry of nearly fifty-four years, there is scarcely any part of my duty on which I reflect with less satisfaction, and more humiliation, than on my service as a *Pastor*; not that I have been more negligent than others. Sometimes I endeavour to excuse myself on the ground of having been located with an ever increasing church, in a large town, my somewhat multifarious public engagements, and my occupations as an author. But my judgment and my conscience refuse the defence, and compel me to plead guilty in this matter, which I sincerely and humbly do. I do not in my old age attach less importance to *preaching*, but I do far more to the pastoral duties; and were my time to come over again, I would, by God's grace, strive to excel more in both, but especially in the latter. In this busy age, the functions of the pastorate are more likely to be neglected than those of the pulpit. It is impressive to recollect that while the Word of God is intended for conversion as well as for sanctification, a large portion of it, especially of the New Testament, and more especially of the epistles, is addressed to professing christians.

Receive then, beloved brethren, these few words of counsel from one who is now much employed with a scrutinizing eye in looking back upon a long life, and who is anxious *you* should profit by the defects and

faults which the retrospect discloses. Do not neglect the pulpit, for preaching is God's institute and instrument for the conversion of sinners; but at the same time do not neglect the duties of the pastorate, for they are designed to build up believers in their holy faith.

All this will demand ceaseless labour, entire devotedness, and untiring persistence; but are we not called to it? Is it not our very business, and did we not on the day of our ordination, before angels, men, and devils, and in the presence of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, consecrate ourselves to it?—aye to the *pastorate* as well as to the pulpit? Then

“Ye who your Lord's commission bear,
His way of mercy to prepare—
Angels he calls ye—be your strife
To lead on earth an angel's life.

Think not of rest; though dreams be sweet,
Start up and ply your heavenward feet.
Is not God's oath upon your head,
Ne'er to sink back in slothful bed?

Never again your loins untie,
Nor let your torches waste and die,
Till when the shadows thickest fall,
Ye hear your Master's midnight call.”

To those who are members, or are thinking of becoming such, I would say, the act of joining a christian church, and entering into the fellowship of Christ's redeemed people, is a momentous step, and should not be done lightly, but with due knowledge of everything which it implies, imposes, and demands. It is an act, the consequences of which will follow us through life, to the bar of God, and into eternity. It is the public profession of our faith in Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of the world, and of our deliberate reception of him as our divine Prophet, Priest, and King,—it is our separation from the principles, habits, and spirit of the world, to those of the church of the living God—it is the

identification of ourselves with that community which is to be a witness for, and an embodiment of, the truth as it is in Jesus. Is this true? Who will deny it? Then how important an act—not only to the individual performing it, but to others, who, according as he is faithful or treacherous to his profession, will be conciliated to religion or prejudiced against it. A church member cannot be a negative character: he must do good or harm: he is the salt of the earth or its poison: he cannot move on unobserved in his course, but is watched by more eyes than he imagines; some of them honestly inquisitive, others charitably jealous, and not a few malignantly waiting for his halting. What manner of person ought he to be, if he would answer the expectations of the friends, and disappoint the hopes of the enemies, of religion?

It is the design of this little volume to show what a church member is by profession, and how he is to harmonise his practice with it—how he is to conduct himself, not only in his individual capacity, not merely in his social relations to the world, but in his connexion *with the church*. A church member is something more than a christian, just as a citizen is something more than a man: each has duties arising from relationship, the one to the state, and the other to the church; and each therefore should seek not only to be a good limb, but a useful member. This "Guide" is designed to teach *relative* duties, as well as *personal* ones.

In the preface of my little work, "The Anxious Inquirer," which so many have read, I have given the following directions for the profitable perusal of it—which I now repeat as appropriate to this:—

1. *Take it with you into your closet*, i.e., your place of retirement for prayer. This is a book to be read when you are alone, when none is near but God and your conscience.

2. *Read it with deep seriousness*. It speaks to you of your conduct as a professing christian, and is designed

to guide you in your course through the church militant, to the church triumphant.

3. *Read it with earnest prayer.* It is on a momentous subject, the life of grace leading on to the life of glory : on your own personal religion, and your conduct to your pastor, your fellow members, and the world : on your glorifying God, doing credit to the christian profession, and influencing the eternal destinies of your fellow creatures.

4. *Do not read too much at a time.* Books that are intended to instruct and impress on such high and awful themes as personal and social religion, should be read slowly. Most persons, on such subjects, read too much at a time.

5. *Meditate on what you read.* It is not the quantity we eat, but what we can digest, that supports our bodily strength. So it is not the quantity we read, but what we understand, meditate upon, and apply, that does good to the soul. Pause and ponder as you go on, and look up by ejaculatory prayer to God to bless the reading for your spiritual benefit.

6. *Read regularly through in order.* Do not let your curiosity wander about, and pick out what you deem most interesting. Begin at the beginning and read on to the end.

7. *Remember the book speaks to you.* It is a guide, a monitor, a helper for you.

8. *Read with the Bible at your elbow, and be sure to turn to the passages quoted.* This will require more time, and give a little more trouble than would be required if the words as well as the chapter and verse were quoted : but this would have made the work more lengthy and therefore more expensive. Moreover it is very desirable you should search the Scriptures for yourselves. It is a useful and blessed thing to acquire a familiarity with the Bible.

9. *Determine by God's grace to follow the guide thus*

offered you. Read not with mere curiosity to know what I write, but with deep solicitude and fixed determination to practice, as far as it is consistent with the Word of God what I prescribe. Say within yourself, "This little book is intended to teach me my duty as a professing christian. God helping, I am resolved to follow its directions. I desire to be an intelligent, eminent, and consistent disciple of Christ. Lord bless the perusal to me for this purpose "

10. I will venture to add one more direction, although in the estimate of some it may savour of vanity. *Procure and read a little volume which I have written, entitled "CHRISTIAN PROGRESS,"* and read that *in the same way* as you do this. It is intended to lead you on in the spiritual life.*

And now I add my own prayers. May the God of all light, love, and holiness bless the perusal of the work to the good of your soul by growth in grace.

J. A. J.

*Published by the Tract Society, price one shilling, and may be ordered by any bookseller in any place.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE NATURE OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

It is obviously incumbent on the members of any community, whether civil or sacred, to acquaint themselves with its constitution and design: without this they can neither adequately enjoy the privileges, nor properly discharge the duties, which their membership brings with it.

It is feared that many who are united in the fellowship of dissenting churches are censurably ignorant of the reasons on which alone their practice can be defended, and are held to us more by feeling than by principle; or attracted, perhaps, by some favourite preacher, upon whose removal they might return to the bosom of the Establishment.

Others remain ignorant of the principles of Nonconformity, from dislike to religious controversy. It is readily conceded that the arena of controversy is not the situation most congenial with the feelings of true piety, and that many have argued for the forms of religion till they have lost its spirit. But certainly we may search for truth without quarrelling with those who in seeking for the same object, pursue it in an opposite direction. If we neglect to enquire into these principles because they are matters of controversy, we should do the same in reference to all our opinions; for which of them has not been in some way or other opposed?

It is admitted, that as in the human frame, so in the system of divine truth, all parts are not equally

important, but because the hand is of less consequence to vitality than the head or the heart, is it of *no* value? Whatever God has made the subject of revealed truth, on that account deserves our attention.

The error of viewing the subject of church government as a mere abstract question is very common, and very pernicious. The government of the church should no more be viewed apart from its moral and spiritual improvement, than the laws of a country should be considered as something distinct from the means of its order, comfort, and strength. The immense importance of the principles of dissent in connexion with the interests of religion at home and abroad, constitutes their chief glory.

It appears to me that no one ought to separate from the Church of England until he is prepared to give a reason for his conduct. Causeless separation is the essence of schism; a sin of which that man is guilty who knows not why he is a dissenter.

What is a Christian Church?

The word church signifies an assembly. It is sometimes employed in the word of God to comprehend the whole body of believers: hence we read of the "general assembly and church of the first-born."—Acts xx, 28; Heb. xii, 23. In its more confined acceptation it means a congregation of professing Christians, meeting for worship in one place: hence we read of the church at Rome, Colosse, et cet. These are the only two senses in which the word is ever employed by the sacred writers; to speak therefore of provincial and national churches is grossly to pervert the term. The sacred writers speak of the *churches* of Galatia, Syria, Asia, et cet.

A church of Christ, then, in the latter and more usual acceptation of the term, means—a number of *professing* Christians, voluntarily united, having *their proper officers*, meeting in one place for the

observance of religious ordinances, and who are independent of all other control than the authority of Christ expressed in his Word. Whether they be few or many, rich or poor, meet either in a mean or magnificent building, or in no building at all: if they answer to the above definition, they are to all intents and purposes a church of Christ.

1. The members of the church should be such *as make a credible profession of their faith in Christ*; in other words, such as appear to be regenerated by the Spirit of God, to have believed in the Lord Jesus for salvation, and to have submitted themselves in their conduct to the authority of his word. The members of the first churches are not merely admonished *to be saints*, but are uniformly addressed *as such*.—Rom. i, 7; 1 Cor. i, 2; et cet. This is a circumstance of great weight in determining upon the proper subjects of fellowship. Since this association is voluntary, it follows that *the church* should judge of the existence in an individual of those qualifications which are necessary to the enjoyment of communion. The act of obtruding any one upon them without their consent, whether by a minister or by elders, is destructive of one purpose of Christian association,—the fellowship of the brethren. It follows of course that the body which admits must also have the right to exclude; otherwise these two powers might be employed against each other, and thus create confusion.

2. This company of professing christians must *meet in one place* for the observance of religious institutes: for a society that cannot associate, an assembly that cannot assemble, are solecisms. When therefore a church becomes too large to communicate at one table, and divides to eat the Lord's Supper, and maintain other parts of worship, in *two distinct places*, there are two churches, and *no longer one only*.

3. These persons must be formed into a society by *mutual voluntary consent*. Parochial limits, Acts of Parliament, or ecclesiastical decrees, have nothing to do in regulating the fellowship of the saints. The civil power, when employed to direct the affairs of the church of Christ, is as manifestly out of place, as it would be in controlling the concerns of sick clubs or literary societies.

4. A church of Christ has its scriptural *officers*. Christ has instituted but two kinds of permanent officers in his church, bishops and deacons. That there were but two is evident, because we have no information concerning the choice, qualifications, or duties of any other. The bishops of the primitive churches corresponded exactly to the pastors of modern ones. That bishop, elder, and pastor, are only different terms for the same office, is evident from Acts xx, 17th, compared with the 28th; Titus i, 5-7, and 1st Peter v, 1-2. They are called bishops, which signifies overseers, because they overlook the spiritual concerns and watch for the souls of their brethren—Acts xx, 28; 1st Tim. iii, 1. Pastors or Shepherds, because they feed the flock of God with truth—Eph. iv, 11; 1 Peter v, 2. Rulers, because they guide the church—Heb. xiii, 7. Elders, because of their age, or of their possessing those qualities which age supposes—Titus i, 5. Ministers, because they are the servants of Christ and the gospel—Eph. vi, 21.

The deacon is appointed to receive and distribute the funds of the church, especially those which are raised for the relief of the poor.—Acts vi. All other kinds of offices than these two are the inventions of men.

We learn from the Acts of the Apostles that nothing was done in the primitive churches without the *co-operation* of the members; no, not even when the *apostles themselves* were present. Even the election

of a new apostle was made by the brethren, and not by the ministers exclusively—Acts i, 21–26. The deacons were chosen by the same persons—Acts vi. The decrees of the council at Jerusalem were passed also by them and went forth with their name—Acts xv, 23. From hence we infer that the election of its own pastor by a church, so entirely accords with the practice of the church in other respects, that an exception in this particular would have been a singular anomaly, which nothing could justify but the plainest and most express provision.

The decisions of *reason* harmonise on this subject with the testimony of revelation; for if we may choose our own lawyer or physician, how much more the man to whom we shall entrust the care of our soul.

5. A Christian church with its office-bearers is *complete within itself*, for the observance of divine ordinances, and the exercise of discipline; and is subject to no authority or tribunal on earth. This is the congregational or independent form of church government; and it is thus denominated to distinguish it from the episcopal, or the government of a diocesan bishop; and from the presbyterian, or the government of the churches by the authority of their assembled pastors and elders. No trace of any foreign control over a church of Christ can be found in the New Testament, except such as was exercised by the apostles as the representatives of Jesus Christ.

6. Such a church is *bound by the authority of Christ in their associated capacity*, to observe all the institutes, to obey all the commands, and to cherish all the dispositions, which relate to their social union, in the time, order, and manner in which they are enjoined by Christ Jesus.

Such is a very concise view of the nature of a Christian church, from which the principles of pro-

testant dissenters will easily be deduced. These principles are either general or particular.

What may be termed the *general* principles of dissent are,—the all sufficiency and exclusive authority of the Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice in matters of religion ;—the consequent denial of the right of legislatures and ecclesiastical conventions to impose any rights, ceremonies, observances, or interpretations of the word of God, upon our belief and practice ;—the inalienable and indefeasible right of every man to expound the word of God for himself, and to worship his Maker in the manner which he deems most accordant with the directions of the Bible ;—the utter impropriety of any alliance of the church of Christ with the governments of this world. These are general principles of dissent, which lead a nonconformist to separate from *all* national establishments of religion whatever.

But there are, also, particular reasons relating to the Church of England. She teaches by the Prayer Book many things which we do not believe ; as for example,—that by baptism the soul is regenerated ;—that her bishops have the power of conferring the Holy Ghost ;—that her priests have power to absolve sins. Her burial service is highly objectionable as leading to the conclusion that all who are interred with the prescribed rites of sepulchre go to heaven. She practises liturgical forms of worship which we deem less edifying than extempore prayer. She multiplies offices beyond all Scripture precedent, until she has too secularised her nature and appearance. By her system of patronage she has taken from the people their just right to elect their own pastors, sanctions the practice of trading in the cure of souls, and deprived herself of the means of preserving a faithful and holy ministry ; and she has *corrupted* the communion of the saints, by the too

indiscriminate admission of persons of unsuitable characters to the Lord's table.

These are among the special reasons of our dissent; that we think them Scriptural is evident from our acting on them in spite of derision and persecution. We invite for them the severest scrutiny, and by all the members of our churches we would have them weighed with especial care: while at the same time we would remind our friends that it becomes them to hold and speak the truth in love. Many wise and holy men, whom God has greatly honoured and blessed in their ministry, take a different view of these matters from us, towards whom we are to cultivate a spirit of christian charity; a spirit which should lead us to put away all bitterness and wrath, and on stating our opinions, or spreading them, to avoid all that would unnecessarily irritate or grieve the minds of our brethren in Christ.

"O divine love! the sweet harmony of souls! the music of angels! the joy of God's own heart! the very darling of his bosom! the source of true happiness! the pure quintessence of heaven! that which reconciles the jarring principles of the world, and makes them all chime together! that which melts men's hearts into one another! Let us express this sweet harmonious affection in these jarring times; that so, if it be possible, we may tune the world into better music. Especially in matters of religion let us strive with all meekness to instruct and convince one another. Let us endeavour to promote the gospel of peace, the dove-like gospel, with a dove-like spirit. This was the way by which it was at first propagated in the world. 'Christ did not cry, nor lift up his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he did not break, and the smoking flax he did not quench; and yet he brought forth judgment unto victory.' He whispered the gospel to us from Mount

Sion, in a still voice; and yet the sound thereof went out quickly throughout all the earth. The gospel came down upon the world gently and softly like the dew on Gideon's fleece; and yet it quickly soaked quite through it. Sweetness and ingenuity will more command men's minds than passion, sourness, and severity; as the soft pillow sooner breaks the flint than the hardest marble. Truth and love are two of the most powerful things in the world, and when they both go together, draw men on with sweet violence whether they will or no.

"True zeal is an *ignis lambens*, a soft and gentle flame, that will not scorch one's hand; it is no predatory or voracious thing: but carnal zeal is like gunpowder set on fire, that tears and blows up all that stands before it. True zeal is like the vital heat in us that we live upon, which we never feel to be angry or troublesome; but though it gently feed upon the radical oil within us, yet it lives lovingly with it, and maintains that by which it is fed: but that other furious and distempered zeal is nothing else but a fever in the soul. To conclude, we may learn what kind of zeal it is that we should make use of in promoting the gospel, by an emblem of God's own,—those fiery tongues, that upon the day of Pentecost sat upon the apostles; which sure were harmless flames, for we cannot read that they did any hurt, or that they did so much as singe a hair of their heads."*

* *Cudworth's Sermon before the House of Commons.*—1647.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

1. CHURCH fellowship is the *exercise of the social principle in matters of religion, and in obedience to the authority of Christ.*

“As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” Social bliss was the finish of paradisaical happiness; its influence has survived the shock of our apostacy, and will be felt amidst the felicities of the heavenly state. As might be expected, our Lord has grafted the duties of his religion upon the propensities of our social nature. He has made it the identifying law of his kingdom, that we should love one another. When therefore we join a Christian church, we enter a society of believers for the purpose of giving and receiving every suitable expression of mutual love. We are not only to worship with them in the same place, and sit with them at the same sacramental board, which, though only one end, many persons seem to imagine is the *only* end and object of church fellowship; but we are to consider ourselves as one of their fellowship, to identify our best feelings with theirs, in all things to consider ourselves members one of another, and to adopt all those modes of expressing Christian sympathy and friendship, by which we can recognise each other as members of a common Head. A beautiful exemplification of this we find in Acts ii. 40–47.

Independently of the advantages arising from this practice, the true ground of it is the authority of our Lord. It is not only a privilege which he has permitted us to enjoy, but a duty which he has *commanded* us to perform. Church fellowship is no less a duty than the observance of the first day sabbath, as the same reasons may be advanced for one as for the other. If a believer, therefore, remain unconnected with some Christian society, he is guilty of direct disobedience against his rightful Lord.

2. Fellowship is *the instituted way of making a public profession of the faith and hope of the gospel.*

A man may hold the opinions and approve the practices of some worldly society, but till he has united himself with it, he is not considered either by its members or the public, as one of their number. Our Lord has laid great stress on the duty of confessing him before men; and it is only by visibly uniting with his people that a man *professes* himself to be a Christian.

3. It is *the visible bond of union with the disciples of Jesus.*

Christians are not only to be united, but to *exhibit* their union. We are indeed united in spirit with the church of Christ from the moment we have believed his gospel; but our union is neither expressed nor recognized until we have joined it in the usual way. We are citizens in feeling and intention, but not yet known from enemies, aliens, and spies.

4. It is *an explicit declaration of our determination to submit to the government and discipline of the church.* The church of the Redeemer, like every other society, has its social rules, which respect the members in their associated capacity. We are therefore not only amenable to the direct authority of Christ, but also to that authority ex-

pressed by the voice of the church ; we must submit to all its regulations, observe all its injunctions, support its decisions, or we can no longer remain in its communion. If we are called before it, we must appear ; if required to explain any part of our conduct, we must comply ; if censured, we must submit. We can voluntarily secede when there is just occasion, or in case of a false decision we can mildly protest ; but as long as we continue members, we must submit, for our very membership professes and requires it.

5. It is designed to exhibit upon a smaller scale that sublime and glorious union which subsists not only between all believers, but *between the whole redeemed church, and their Divine Head*. Eph. i, 10. Eph. iv, 4. 1 John. i, 3. From these very striking passages we learn that the aggregate of believers, united to Jesus Christ, and through him to the Father, form one vast, harmonious fellowship of holiness and benevolence. They are united in the same pursuit, which is the divine glory ; in the same means for the attainment of that object, which is the salvation of the soul. The church universal will ever remain the one grand monument on which are recorded the praises of the living God. Of this general assembly every particular society is the miniature resemblance. By its public worship, its beautiful subordination, mutual affection, its truth, its holiness, its peace, it is an exhibition to the world of that fellowship which has God in Christ for its head, all believers for its members, heaven for its temple, and eternity for its duration ; while every time it assembles for worship, it shows forth the unity of the holy catholic church and the communion of saints.

CHAPTER III.

FORM OF ADMISSION TO THE CHURCH.

It should be stated here that we do not consider the Lord's Supper and church fellowship converting ordinances, but edifying, strengthening, comforting, and cementing ones: and, of course, intended only for such as are hopefully converted already. The primitive churches were addressed as "saints," "faithful brethren," "those who call on the Lord Jesus;" and indeed none else could fulfil the purposes, and answer the designs of the Lord's Supper. It is therefore highly improper to urge people to join the church till there is good reason to hope they are truly renewed; for if they enter into church communion in an unconverted state, the great probability is that they will ever remain so.

When persons wish to enter into fellowship with us, they either go without introduction to the pastor, or speak to some one of the members to introduce them: and it is considered to be the duty of the members, not only to be ready to perform this office of christian friendship when solicited to do it, but to look out among those whom they may happen to know, for truly devout persons, and offer to go with them to their minister; such persons being often timid and retiring in the early stage of their religious history, and standing in great need of encouragement. Upon their interview with the *minister*, he enters into conversation with them, and *examines* them upon the two points of their know-

ledge and experience ; and if he finds them sufficiently advanced in both at the first interview, which is very rarely the case, he consents to propose them to the church for fellowship, at its next meeting. If on the contrary, he finds them too immature, he requests another, and another interview, which in some cases is repeated many times. When he deems it proper, i. e., when he has upon the whole sufficient evidence that such persons are sincere christians, and competently acquainted with the doctrines and duties of the word of God, the ends of church communion, and the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, he proposes their names to the assembled church, when they are accepted as candidates for fellowship, and usually the deacons, or two other persons, are appointed to converse with them touching their religious knowledge and experience, and to make enquiry into their manner of life and general conduct. It would seem to many as if this were the exclusive care and duty of the pastor, and that therefore the inquiries of the brethren were superfluous and intrusive, or even inquisitorial. But it is to be recollected that a necessity for this arises out of the constitution of our churches, which are formed upon the principle of a voluntary union, and reciprocal knowledge of each other's sentiments and characters ; and it is therefore every way proper that the church, by a deputation of its own, should be satisfied of the piety of those whom it receives into its communion. Moreover, it might happen also, that a pastor, if the sole power of admission were vested with him, would be tempted in certain contingencies, to admit improper persons : either, for instance, to magnify his own importance as a useful preacher, or to swell his party in a time of conflict with his people. But it seems clear also that in the first churches, the right of admission and exclusion was with the people : *they chose the deacons,—Acts vi ; they were com-*

manded to receive the weak in faith, "Him that is weak in faith, receive ye"—Romans xiv, 1. *They* were reasoned with and reproved concerning the sinful member of the church of Corinth; both his exclusion and re-admission were referred to them.—1 Cor. v, 4-7; 2 Cor. ii, 6-8. On these grounds we think it right that the admission of members to the church, should be the church's own act.

At the church meeting succeeding that when the candidates were proposed, the pastor and the deputies make their report, which is accompanied sometimes by a written statement of the religious views, feelings, and determinations of the candidates; who are then admitted by the suffrages of the brethren, and on being introduced are addressed by the pastor, who, at the close of his address, gives to each candidate the right hand of christian fellowship in the name of the church.

The address is longer or shorter as the feelings of the pastor may prompt, or the circumstances of the candidates may seem to require. The following form is introduced from an American Manual, as used in one of the Presbyterian churches in New York, and is so full, so solemn, and so excellent, that it may with great propriety be copied here:—

EXPLANATION.

"You have now presented yourselves in this public manner before God, to take his covenant upon you—to confess Jesus Christ before men—to testify your faith, and hope, and joy in his religion—practically to condemn your former selves, together with the whole world, as lying in wickedness,—unreservedly to dedicate yourselves to the service of your Creator—and definitely to incorporate yourselves with his visible people. You are about to profess *supreme love to God, sincere contrition for all your sins of heart and life, and faith unfeigned in the*

Lord Jesus Christ. You are about publicly to ratify a solemn compact to receive the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as revealed in the Scriptures, in all the agencies they execute for the government of the world, and in all the offices they sustain for the salvation of the church; and to walk, henceforth, in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless."

ENCOURAGEMENT.

"We trust you have fully considered the purport of these several professions and engagements. The transaction before you is solemn in its nature, and will be followed with eternal consequences. God and holy angels, as well as this church, these spectators, and your own consciences—your pastor and these elders, are witnesses—your vows will be recorded in heaven; they will be publicly exhibited on your trial at the last day. Nevertheless, with these reflections you need not be overwhelmed. In the precious name of Jesus Christ, which is as ointment poured forth, you may 'boldly enter into the holiest, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh: and having a High Priest over the house of God, you may draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith; having your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and your bodies washed with pure water,' by baptism, according to his appointment. For 'this is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ: not by water only, but by water and blood: and it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.' God is indeed great in majesty, infinite in power, glorious in holiness, inflexible in justice, and fearful even in praises: still, he is abundantly merciful and *gracious*; and as such, manifests himself by *graciously* condescending, through Jesus Christ, to

enter into covenant with sinners. You may venture then, in the filial spirit, IRREVERSIBLY thus to commit yourselves; and trust to his promised and inviolable faithfulness for strength to discharge your obligations, and perform your engagements."

DEDICATION.

"And now, in the presence of God, angels, and men, you do solemnly avouch the LORD JEHOVAH to be your God and Portion, the object of your supreme love and delight; and the LORD Jesus CHRIST to be your Saviour from sin and death, your Prophet to instruct you, your Priest to atone and intercede for you, and your King to rule, protect, and enrich you; and the HOLY GHOST to be your Illuminator, Sanctifier, Comforter, and Guide, looking to him for light, grace, and peace; unto this TRIUNE GOD—this wonderful "*Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,*" into which we are baptised—you do now, without reserve, give yourselves away, in a covenant never to be revoked, to be his willing servants for ever, to observe all his commandments, and all his ordinances, in the sanctuary, in the family, and in the closet. You do also bind yourselves by covenant to this church, to watch over us in the Lord, to seek our purity, peace, and edification, and conscientiously to submit to the government and discipline of Christ as here administered; counting it a privilege and a favour—not a privation and a grievance—to be subject in the Lord to that authority which Himself hath established in his church, and which He hath made it not more the duty of his officers to exercise, than of his members to obey.

"All this, in the divine strength, you do severally profess and engage."

ACCEPTATION.

"In consequence of these your professions and

engagements, we do affectionately open our arms to receive you as members of this church, and in the name of Christ declare you entitled to all its visible privileges. We welcome you as *brethren in Christ*, to this fellowship with us in the labours and the blessings, the toils and the honours, the crosses and the crowns, the trials and rewards of the gospel of our risen Redeemer: and on our part, engage, in his strength, to watch over you, to seek your edification, and to aid your progress through this wilderness to the fields of real pleasure beyond it. Should you have occasion, in Providence, to remove from us, to live within the bounds or in the neighbourhood of another church, we shall hold it our duty to give, as it will be yours to seek, a recommendation from us, which will place you under the watch and care of that portion of the family of Christ; for hereafter you can never withdraw from the pale of the church, or live in the neglect of sealing ordinances, without a breach of covenant."

EXHORTATION.

"And now, beloved in the Lord, let it be impressed on your minds that you have entered into a solemn condition, from which you can never escape. Wherever you may be, and however you may act, these vows will remain upon you through life. They will follow you to the bar of God, and in whatever world you may be fixed, they will abide upon you to eternity. You can never again be as you have been! You have unalterably *committed* yourselves, and henceforth you *must* be the servants of God! Hereafter, the eyes of the world will be upon you, and as you demean yourselves, so will religion be honoured or disgraced. 'Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ,' and you will be a *credit and comfort* to us; but if it be otherwise, you *will be to us a grief of heart, a stumbling-block, and*

a vexation ; and if there be a woe pronounced upon him who offends one of Christ's little ones, woe, woe to the person who offends a whole church ! ' But, dearly beloved, we hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though we thus speak.' May the Lord strengthen you, and give you a comfortable passage through this transitory life, and after its warfare shall be accomplished, bring us altogether into that blessed church, where our communion shall be for ever perfect, and our joy for ever full. Grace be with you. Amen."

QUERIES FOR THOSE WHO CONTEMPLATE UNITING
WITH THE CHURCH BY A PUBLIC PROFESSION
OF THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST.

You wish to profess religion—why ?

Is it your duty ?—what makes it such ?

Are you a christian, a disciple of Christ ; what evidences satisfies you of it ?

When you take your seat at the communion-table, should this be the case, will you feel that your religion is ended—or only just begun ? that you need more knowledge, more experience, more usefulness ?

For what, think you, is the visible church divinely organised and maintained in the world ?

Are you cordially willing to be subject in the Lord to the oversight and discipline of his house ?

Do you now desire to be useful in the cause of that blessed Redeemer in whom you have hope ?

What is the basis, what the warrant, what the evidence of your hope ? Is it of the right kind ?

Do you realise that the act of profession is your own ? the responsibility of it yours ? that a *professor* is one thing, and a *possessor* another ; always *in idea*, often in fact ?

What is assurance? Is it yours? Ought it not to be?

Have you any hearty, and prayerful, and practical desire for the salvation of souls?

Are you willing in any known respect to deny yourself for Christ's sake?

Are you free to confess Christ wherever and whenever you ought? or are you ever ashamed of him?

Do you expect to renounce the world as your portion, when you avouch the Lord in public?

Is it your highest desire to be holy, and walk with God for ever?

Do you love christians, all christians, as christians? and that, because they love God, and God loves them?

Did you ever solemnly ponder the question, supposing you are a true disciple of the Son of God, why did I ever become such, when others live and die not such? "Who maketh me to differ from another, and what have I that I did not receive?"

How much do you at heart care for the love of Christ, the glory of God, and the progress of religion in the world? Are you willing to catechise your life, habitually to its close, for an answer?*

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP.

1. THE participation of the Lord's supper.

That sacramental seasons are commonly the most profitable and happy which a believer ever spends under the means of grace is not to be wondered at. It is at the sacred supper that the attention is usually most arrested and fixed, and the soul most deeply impressed. It is there that the scheme of redeeming mercy seems peculiarly to expand upon the understanding, and excite the emotions of the heart; there has the glory of the Divine character been most clearly discovered; there has the Eternal Spirit descended into our souls, in the most munificent communications of his sanctifying and consoling influence. How have our icy hearts there melted beneath the ardour of celestial love, and flowed down in streams of godly sorrow! How have our grovelling, earthly minds soared aloft on the wings of faith and hope! There we have felt ourselves crucified with Christ, and have risen with him into newness of life. There brotherly love has glowed with its most perfect fervour, and the communion of saints has yielded its most precious delights. Happier hours than those which have been there spent we never expect to know in this world: they have left a relish and a fragrance upon the mind; the remembrance of them is sweet, and the anticipation of their return is amongst the *brightest hopes* we have on this side the veil.

2. Another privilege connected with membership, is *the right of assisting in the choice of a pastor ; in the election of deacons ; and in the admission and exclusion of members.* It must surely be accounted no inconsiderable privilege to have a voice in the election of an individual on whose ministrations so much of our spiritual welfare, and that of our families, depends ; and in the admission and exclusion of those, with whom we are to hold christian fellowship.

3. A church member has the advantage of *pastoral oversight and supplication.*

"They watch for your souls," said the apostle to the ancient christians, when speaking of their pastors ; evidently implying that it was a great privilege to be the subjects of such inspection. A faithful friend that will instruct, warn, comfort, or reprove, as circumstances may require, is a great treasure, and such an one a christian will find, or ought to find, in his minister. One who will follow every individual of his charge, as far as can be, through all their spiritual career ; rousing them when lukewarm, lending his ear to their every complaint, and opening his heart to receive their every grief. A shepherd, to provide for their wants—a watchman, to observe the approach of their dangers—he will never cease his solicitude until the portals of heaven have closed upon their disembodied spirits.

In addition to this, the pastor bears the church in the arms of his affection, and presents them in his prayers before the throne of grace. Like the high priest of the Jews, he approaches the mercy-seat, not with the names of the people merely engraven upon his breastplate, but written upon his heart. Not only are sermons composed, but prayers are presented, which are adapted to the individual cases of his flock. The afflicted, the backsliding, the tempted, the novice, are all in turn

remembered in his holiest moments before God ; nor can any of these individuals say to which they are most indebted, his sermons or his supplications.

4. *The watchfulness, sympathy, and prayers of the church are no inconsiderable privilege of membership.* We are commanded to exhort one another daily ; and amidst such temptations, weakness, and corruptions as ours, is it not an unspeakable mercy to be surrounded by those who will watch over us and assist us ? With every help, how difficult it is to maintain the purity and vigour of true godliness ; how often do our steps slip, and our exertions relax, perhaps before *we* perceive our danger ! In such cases, none can estimate the value of those Christian friends who with faithful love will warn and admonish us.

And then think of the value of christian *sympathy*. How consolatory is it in our troubles to recollect that there are those who affectionately remember our situation and pity our distress, and mention us in their *prayers*. Ah ! how often has the afflicted believer felt it lighten his load, and irradiate his gloom, as he groaned away the hour when the church was assembled, to believe that they were thinking of him and blessing him with their prayers. It has been as if an angel were sent to inform him that supplication was being made for him, and that therefore he ought to dry his tears. Yes, and the sweet remembrance has often made the tears forget to fall, and the half uttered groan to die away into silent submission. He has lain down upon his restless couch again, and it seemed as if it had been smoothed afresh for him by some viewless agent ; and so it has, for God has heard the prayers of the church on his behalf, and has made "all his bed in his sickness."

CHAPTER V.

THE GENERAL DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS IN THEIR INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY.

1. They should seek to acquire clear and enlarged views of divine truth.

It is a deplorable fact that very many of those whom we believe to be real christians are mere babes in knowledge. This in most cases is their fault, and not their misfortune merely. We are commanded to grow in knowledge, and the apostle severely reproveth the Hebrews for their ignorance. "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God." How earnestly did he supplicate for the churches an increase of their religious knowledge!—Eph. i, 17, 18; Col. i, 9.

The *causes* of this deficiency in our members are various. In many cases the want of a religious education contributes to it. Not a few of them are brought in from the world when they are far advanced in life. There is with many a more culpable cause, a systematic neglect of the subject. "What," they exclaim, "will *head* knowledge do for us; we are for experience." What kind of experience that is which is not founded on knowledge, I am at a loss to conceive. With such people, ignorance appears to be the mother of devotion. How much more real enjoyment of the truth is possessed by him who clearly and comprehensively understands it, and how much more useful is he

likely to be in communicating instruction, than the individual who barely understands first principles !

Let christians study the Scriptures ; let them read theological books which explain and prove the doctrines of the gospel ; let them attend upon the preaching of the word with a view not only to be comforted, but to be instructed. The exclusive object for which some persons hear sermons is to obtain a little comfort. They sit waiting and watching for some sweet and savory assurance, some well-known, hack-nied, consolatory topic, some lively appeal to the experience ; and until this comes they think lightly of every thing else : the minister may have given the clearest elucidation of some dark and doubtful passage, the most profound discussion of some sublime doctrine, the most masterly defence of some disputed truth, but to the mere comfort-hunters, all this is nothing else than the husk or the shell, which is to be cracked and thrown away for the kernel of a little christian experience. From such sermons they go home with hungry and cheerless appetites, complaining that they have proved it a lost opportunity. Let me not be mistaken. Comfort ought to be sought for, but always through the medium of knowledge. The best warmth is that which comes, not from ardent spirits, but from the sun, which sends his heat to the frame in those beams which convey light to the eye. The fact is that some people's religion is of that weak, unhealthy kind, which is supported only by elixirs and cordials.

After all, I am constrained to confess that the darkness which rests upon the mind of the church member is, in some cases, the result of that cloudiness which envelopes the mind of the pastor. When the preacher dwells on nothing but a few commonplace topics of an experimental or consolatory nature ; *when a text is selected from time to time which it requires no study to understand, no ability to ex-*

pound ; when all the varied and sublime parts of revealed truth are neglected for one ceaseless round of beaten subjects, until the introduction of a new or original conception would startle the congregation almost as much as the entrance of a spectre ; who can wonder that such "drowsy tinklings" should "lull the fold," till with their shepherd, they sink to the slumbers of indifference, amidst the thickening gloom of religious ignorance.

2. *Advancement in religion* is incumbent on every professing christian.

Alas ! often have we seen, especially in the case of young persons, that the act of joining the church has diminished the earnestness with which their minds were formerly directed to the subject of religion. They seemed to be growing rapidly as babes in Christ, till the consciousness of being a church member, and acknowledged as a christian, either by generating pride, or relaxing diligence, has paralysed their piety, arrested their growth, and left them dwarfs in grace for ever after.

Instead of considering our union with the church as the goal of our religious career, where improvement may cease, and progress be stopped, we should view it but as the very starting point, whence we are to "forget the things that are behind, and press towards the mark for the prize of our high calling." From that moment we are under more solemn obligations than ever to grow in grace, inasmuch as the means of growth and fruitfulness are increased.

3. *Consistency in their conduct* as professing christians, is a most obvious and pressing obligation of church members.

The want of this has done more harm to christianity than all the ravings of infidelity. Bloodguiltiness lies upon the conscience of that man whose conduct opposes his profession. He has been accessory to the death of souls ! Some that sought for an

opiate for their consciences, and an apology for their sins, found it in his misconduct. Especially beware of what may be called the *minor* breaches of consistency. Instances of drunkenness and debauchery are rare, while ten thousand acts of lesser delinquency, such as the church cannot take cognizance of, are continually occurring in the conduct of christians, to the disgrace of religion, and the injury of men's souls. Those things are marked in us which would pass unnoticed in others. A christian's character is like polished steel, which may have its lustre destroyed, not only by broad spots of rust, but by an assemblage of innumerable little specks. More scandals have occurred in the christian world from dishonourable pecuniary transactions than from any other source. The world is a dangerous and successful foe to grace; and although every church member professes himself to be through faith a conqueror, how many by their artful, imposing, ungenerous way of conducting business, prove that they are yet enslaved by this sordid enemy!

4. Church members *should excel in the manifestation of the christian temper.*

The mind which was in Christ Jesus should be in them; they should consider *his* character as the model of their own, and be conspicuous for their poverty of spirit, meekness, gentleness, and love. It is matter of surprise and regret that many persons seem to think that religion has nothing to do with the temper; and provided they are free from gross sins, and have lively feelings in devotional exercises, they may be as petulant, irritable, and implacable as they please. This is a dreadful error, and has done great mischief to the cause of God. A christian should be like God, and God is LOVE. Every professing christian should often read with *earnest prayer* the thirteenth chapter of Paul's first *Epistle to the Corinthians*.

5. Church members *should be very eminent for a right discharge of all their social duties.*

The apostles have given to this great importance, by the frequency with which they have enjoined it. Religion should give additional tenderness to the conjugal relationship; greater love to the parent, and obedience to the child; fresh kindness to the master, and diligence to the servant. Then will religion have attained its highest credit upon earth, when it shall be admitted, by universal consent, that to say a man is a christian, is an indisputable testimony to his excellence, in all the relations he bears to society.

6. There are duties to be discharged *in reference to the world.*

We are commanded to "let our light shine before men, that they seeing our good works may glorify our Father who is in heaven,"—to "walk in wisdom towards them which are without,"—"to have our conversation honest (the word signifies beautiful, honourable) amongst the Gentiles." In order to comply with this, we must act consistently in regard to those duties which fall under the notice of our fellow creatures—we must abound in mercy; bear a prudent testimony against evil practices; be exact in the performance of our engagements; live peaceably; seek to please and benefit all; and set an example of industry, honesty, and generosity.

7. We should be *exemplary in our obedience to the civil magistrate.*

"Let every soul be subject to the higher powers." This of course relates to matters purely civil. If rulers enjoin any thing which is condemned by the word of truth, it is our duty to "obey God rather than man." Whilst as dissenters, we claim the right of judging for ourselves in matters of religion, *we should be careful to obey those laws which are not opposed to the authority of the Bible. Reject-*

ing as irrational and unscriptural the extreme doctrine of passive obedience, we think that a christian ought not to be a turbulent, factious, or noisy politician. We admit that the most spiritual christian *may* take an interest, and *ought* to take an interest in public affairs; nay, that he ought to maintain a ceaseless jealousy over the constitution and freedom of his country; still we contend that a constant and factious meddling in party politics is as injurious to his own personal religion as it is to the interest of piety in general. We do not cease to be citizens when we become christians; but we are in danger of ceasing to be christians when we become politicians. Thousands of professors of religion have made shipwreck of their faith and of a good conscience, during the tempests of political agitation; let us then, as we value our lives, be cautious how we embark on this stormy and troubled ocean.

There is one way in which many christians offend against the laws of their country without scruple and without remorse; I mean by endeavouring to evade the payment of taxes. "Render unto Cæsar, the things that are Cæsar's, tribute to whom tribute is due, and custom to whom custom," is a precept which was delivered at a time, and under a government, in which the taxes were imposed by the arbitrary power of a despot. Certainly if under *these* circumstances it was the duty of a Christian to pay the tribute money, any effort which *we* make to evade it, must be additionally criminal, since *we* are taxed by the will of our parliamentary representatives. Reason and revelation unite to condemn any attempt to defraud the revenue; and the *excuses* usually made in its justification only serve to show how far some good men may be imposed upon, by *the deceitfulness of the human heart.*

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO THEIR PASTORS.

MINISTERS are in a subordinate sense ambassadors for Christ, and are to be received and esteemed in a way that corresponds with the authority and glory of the Sovereign who commissions them. No earthly sovereign will allow his messengers to be rejected and insulted with impunity, much less will the Lord of the church. Those who despise Christ's ministers, who entertain low thoughts of the pastoral office, and speak slightly of those who hold it; who endeavour to lessen that just respect, to which, on account of their Master and their work, they are entitled; and seek in any way to disparage and degrade them, despise Christ himself, and incur his heavy displeasure.—Luke x, 16; 1 Thessalonians, v, 13.

1. *Submission to their just and Scriptural authority is required.*

It is readily admitted that the unscriptural domination of the priesthood, is the root of papal tyranny; which springing up like a poison tree in the garden of the Lord, withered and blighted almost every plant and every flower of genuine Christianity. Still, however, there is authority belonging to the pastor, for office without authority is a solecism.

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves."—Heb., xiii, 7, 17; 1 Cor., xvi, 15.

16. *The authority of pastors is not legislative or*

coercive, but simply declarative and executive. It is difficult to define its limits with precision. He is to command, yet he is not to "lord it over God's heritage." In the same undefined and general manner the duties of the conjugal union are laid down in Scripture. In each of these instances the union is founded on mutual love, confidence, and esteem; and it might therefore be rationally supposed that there would arise no contests for power. The very circumstance of the pastor's prerogative being undefined, should make him afraid of extending it, and his church cautious of diminishing it. I believe that in some of our churches, the pastor is depressed far below his just level. He is considered merely in the light of a speaking brother. His opinion is received with no deference, his person is treated with no respect; he has no official distinction or authority. The tyranny of a minister has some shadow of excuse from the undefined nature of the duties of his office; but the tyranny of a church over their pastor is without apology, for they have no office, and therefore no power.

2. Church members should treat their pastor *with distinguishing honour, esteem, and love.*

1 Tim. v, 17; 1 Thess. v, 11 12. Love is the most inventive passion of the heart, and will find, or make, a thousand opportunities for displaying its power. Love is also *practical*; it breathes in kind words, and lives in kind deeds. Some people treat their minister as if he could feel nothing but blows. They are rude, uncourteous, churlish. Instead of this let him see the most studious and constant care to promote his happiness and usefulness. When he is in sickness, visit him; in trouble, sympathize with him; when absent from home, take a kind interest in his family; when he returns, greet him *with a smile*. It is astonishing what an influence is *sometimes* produced upon a minister's mind and

comfort, even by the least expression of his people's regard. Of this we have a beautiful instance in the life of St. Paul.—Acts xxviii, 15. At this interview with the christian friends who had come as far as Appii Forum and the Three Taverns, to meet him, fears of Nero, of prison, and of death, all left him, and with new ardour he sprang forward in his career, prepared to offer himself in sacrifice on the altar of martyrdom !

3. *Attendance upon their ministrations* is another duty which church members owe their pastors.

This should be *constant*, not occasional. How many are irregular in their attendance on the house of God from reasons most paltry and insufficient, or worse ! A little inclemency of weather, or a slight indisposition of body, which would not detain them from the most inconsiderable worldly occupation, is sure to render their seat vacant.* A journey commenced on Sabbath evening, will hinder some from being at worship on that part of the day.

It is a great inconsistency for professing Christians voluntarily to choose a residence which from its remoteness from the house of God, must often deprive them of the communion of the saints. Mothers are often detained from public worship by the injustice of unfeeling husbands who neglect to take *their share* of parental duty.

Professing Christians should feel the obligations to attend public worship, not only on the Sabbath day, but also on *week day* services. Surely, with such hearts, and amidst such circumstances as ours, it is too long to go from Sabbath to Sabbath without the aid of public worship. The christian that neglects meetings for *social prayer*, betrays such an utter indifference to the interests of the church,

* I much fear that a spirit of self-indulgence is creeping over our church members, and keeping them at home by the fire-side, when they ought to be in the house of God.

and the comfort of the pastor, as well as so much lukewarmness in his own personal religion, as to be a fit subject for pastoral rebuke.*

4. *Earnest prayer.*

In 2nd Cor. i, 11, Paul ascribes his deliverance and preservation from pressing dangers to the prayers of the church; and how often and earnestly did he use this entreaty, "Brethren, pray for us!" Pray then for your ministers, for the increase of their intellectual attainments, spiritual qualifications, and ministerial success. Pray for them in private; pray for them at the family altar, and thus teach your servants and children to respect and love them. Little do their people know the number and magnitude of their temptations, discouragements, difficulties, and trials. Cares of oppressive weight; anxieties which can be known only by experience; labours of a mental kind almost too strong and incessant for the mind to sustain; fall to their lot, and demand the prayerful sympathy of their flocks. Regard to your own spiritual profit, if nothing else, should prompt to this, for ministers are to their people, just what God makes them, and no more. Prayer is a means of assisting a minister within the reach of all. The sick, the poor, the timid, the ignorant, the dying, all can bear their pastor on their hearts before the throne of divine grace. Prayer is the best fuel for the flame of love, and the very extinguisher of enmity. If some Christians would take from the time which they spend in *praising* their ministers, and others from that which they employ in *blaming* them, and devote it to *praying* for them, the former would find still more cause for admiration, and the latter far less reason for censure.

* Is it not a general complaint, especially in large towns and the metropolis, that our weekly meetings are sadly neglected? If so, does not this indicate the growth of a Laodicean spirit?

5. *Members should encourage others to attend upon the ministry of their pastors.*

The minister cannot do this ; his hearers can, and be incredibly useful in this way. I have received very many into the fellowship of the church under my care who were first brought under the sound of the gospel by the kind solicitations of a pious neighbour. To draw away the hearers of one faithful preacher to another is a despicable ambition, mere sectarian zeal ; but to invite those who never hear the gospel to listen to the joyful sound, is an effort worthy the mind of an angel.—Rev. xxii, 17 ; John iv, 29.

6. It is incumbent on church members *to make known to their pastor any thing of importance that occurs within their observation or their experience, relating to his church or congregation, of which he may be supposed to be in ignorance.* For instance, their own spiritual embarrassments, trials, temptations ; the declensions and sins of others, which they imagine may have escaped his notice, and which they have first tried by their own personal efforts to remove. This doubtless requires extreme caution and delicacy. If they perceive any root of bitterness growing up which they have not strength or skill enough to eradicate ; such as dissatisfaction in the minds of the members with any part of their pastor's conduct, or any growing strife amongst themselves, it is manifestly their duty to inform him of the circumstance. If they perceive any individual whose case has been overlooked, any one in circumstances which need sympathy or relief, any who are struggling with affliction, but are too modest or timid to disclose their situation ; they should bring all such occurrences under his notice. Especially should they encourage by their own personal attention, any persons in the congregation who appear to be under religious concern. There

are some Christians (do they deserve the name?) who would see all the process of conversion going on in the very next seat to theirs, and observe the fixed attention, the anxious look, the tearful eye, and all this repeated one Sabbath after another, without ever exchanging a single syllable with the enquiring penitent, or giving any intimation to the pastor!! Shame on such professors!!

7. Zealous co-operation in all schemes of usefulness proposed by the pastor, is the duty of christians. This is an age of restless activity, practical benevolence, and progressive improvement.

One scheme of benefit often contains the germs of many. The love of innovation, and the dread of it, are equally remote from true wisdom. It is most disheartening to ministers to find their efforts counteracted by that ignorance which can comprehend nothing strange,—by that bigotry which is attached to every thing old,—by that timidity which starts at every thing new,—or by that avarice which condemns every thing expensive. It is a scandal to any christian society to allow the flame of ministerial zeal to burn out in the pulpit, without enkindling a similar fire in the pew.

8. A most tender and delicate regard for the pastor's reputation.

A minister's character is the lock of his strength; if this be sacrificed, he is like Samson, shorn of his hair, the pity of his friends, and the derision of his enemies. I would not have bad ministers screened, nor would I have good ones maligned. When I consider the malignity, craft, and power of the great enemy of God and holiness, I can account for it on no other ground than that of a special interposition of Providence, that the reputation of christian pastors is not more frequently attacked and destroyed by calumny. Church members should neither expect to see their pastor perfect, nor hunt after his

failings. For those imperfections which may co-exist with not only real, but eminent piety, make all reasonable excuse. Let them not be the subject of conversation, even between yourselves, much less before your children, servants, and the world. I know nothing more ungenerous, nothing more mischievous, than the levity, sarcasm, and contempt with which some persons talk of their ministers before their families. How can such people expect that their children or servants can profit by those ministrations which they have thus taught them to despise, as well as the man that conducts them. If you talk of his faults in derision, who will speak of his excellencies with admiration? *Defend him against the groundless attacks of others*; and beware of that slanderous silence which is more defamatory than the broadest accusation. Especially guard against those dangerous and mischievous persons which infest some of our churches, and are perpetually insinuating that their ministers do not preach the gospel, merely because they do not continually repeat the same truths in the same words; because they do not allegorize and spiritualize all the facts of the Old Testament, until they have found as much gospel in the horses of Pharaoh's chariot as they can in St. Paul's epistles; and because they have dared to enforce the moral law as the rule of a believer's conduct. This antinomian spirit is the most mischievous and disgusting of all errors.

9. *Liberal support.*

Let it not be thought that what is given to a minister is a *charitable donation*: it is the payment of a just debt. It is what Christ claims for his faithful servants, and cannot be withheld without robbery. I spurn for myself, and for my brethren, the *degrading idea* that we are supported by mere *bounty*. Our appeal is to justice, and if our claims

are denied on this ground, we refuse to plead before any other tribunal, and refer the matter to the great assize.

The Scripture is very explicit on this head.—Gal. vi, 6; 1 Cor. ix, 7, 14. The necessity of this appears from such injunctions as 2 Tim. ii, 4; 1 Tim. iv, 13, 15. It is to the deep, wide, and eternal reproach of some churches, that although possessed of ability to support their pastors in comfort, they dole out but a wretched pittance from their affluence, leaving them to make up the deficiency by a school; and then, with insulting cruelty, complain that their sermons are very meagre and have a great sameness. Many rich christians spend more in the needless wine they drink, and others give more for the sugar that sweetens their tea, than they contribute towards the support of their pastor.

In a matter like this, all that can be done is to state general principles. Let christians consider what is a just and generous reward for the labours of a man who is devoting his life to assist them in obtaining eternal joy, and exerting at the same time an indirect and beneficial influence upon all their temporal prosperity. What is a sufficient acknowledgment for all those sermons which they hear with so much delight? How can they ever reward him, who by his ministrations lightens their sorrows, mortifies their sins, throws a radiance over their darkest scenes, and gilds their brightest ones with additional splendour; who brings heaven down to earth for their comfort, and elevates them from earth to heaven; and who, after mitigating for them the ills of time with an anticipation of the joys of eternity, is prepared to attend them to the verge of the dark valley, and irradiate its gloom with the visions of immortality. It is discreditable to a *christian* when about to accept an invitation to the *pastorate* to higggle about a salary: still more dis-

graceful is it to a church to drive him by its parsimoniousness to this seeming necessity. Will the time ever come when such bargaining will cease, and a generous profusion, without stipulated amounts, shall be everywhere displayed. An approximation to this is going on in the advocacy of the weekly offering.

CHAPTER VII.

DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TOWARDS EACH OTHER.

I. The first, and that which indeed seems to include every other, is LOVE.

This is enforced by our Lord as the identifying law of his kingdom.—John xv, 12. Jesus Christ was an incarnation of love in our world. He was love, living, breathing, speaking, acting, amongst men. “His birth was the nativity of love, his sermons the words of love, his miracles the wonders of love, his tears the meltings of love, his crucifixion the agonies of love, his resurrection the triumph of love.” He has made his love to us, not only the motive, but the pattern, of our love to each other. “This is my commandment, that ye love one another *as* I have loved you.” *His* love was real and great: free, disinterested, and fruitful: it was eternal and unchangeable; a love of forbearance and forgiveness, and a purely *spiritual* flame. These were the characteristics of *his* love, and should therefore be of *ours*. Love is the basis, cement, and beauty of the christian union, and in the best and purest ages of the church, it shone so brightly in the character of its members, and was expressed in actions so replete with noble, disinterested, and heroic affection, as to become a proverb with surrounding pagans, and call forth the well known exclamation, “See how *these christians* love one another!” Brotherly love *will operate,*

1. *In peculiar complacency in our fellow members, viewed as the objects of divine love.*

Complacency is the very essence of love; and the ground of all proper complacency in the saints is their relation and likeness to God. The love of christians is of a very sacred nature, and is quite peculiar. It is an affection for them primarily for God's sake, and only secondarily for their own. They may admire many things in each other, but christian love rests on the ground of a common relationship to Christ.

2. *Love to our brethren will lead us to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*
—Gal. vi, 2.

How touching would such a salutation as this be from one christian to another,—“Brother, I have observed with pain that your countenance has been covered with gloom, as if you were sinking under some inward solicitude. I would not wish to obtrude myself on your attention, farther than is agreeable, but I offer you the expression of christian sympathy, and the assistance of christian counsel. Can I in any way assist to mitigate your care, and to restore your tranquillity?” At such sounds the burdened heart would feel as if half its load were gone. It may be, the kind inquirer could yield no effectual relief; but there is balm in his sympathy. The indifference of some professing christians to the burdens of their brethren is shocking; they would see them crushed to the very earth with cares and sorrows, and never make one kind enquiry into their situation, nor lend a helping hand to lift them from the dust!

3. *Love requires that we should visit our brethren in their affliction.*

“I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me: for as much as ye did it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye did it unto

me." These are the words of Jesus Christ; and yet, how many are there now bearing his name who scarcely ever yet paid one visit to the bed-side of suffering brother! Let them not expect to hear these words. I have sometimes been grieved, when upon enquiring of the sufferer, whether such as such an individual, residing in the neighbourhood had been to visit them, it has been said in substance, "Oh no, sir; I have now been stretched on this bed for days and weeks. My pain and weakness have been so great that I have scarcely been able to collect my thoughts for meditation and prayer. The sight of a christian friend would have been refreshing, but although my disease has nothing whatever of infection to produce caution, no friend has been near me, and my sorrows have been aggravated by the neglect of the church, which I joined with the hope of finding sympathy, which I was taught not only to expect, but to consider as one of the benefits and ends of christian fellowship." It might be well for the pastor at every church meeting to mention the names of the afflicted member and stir up the brethren to visit them.

4. *Pray one for another*, James v, 16.

Not only *with*, but *for* one another. This would much increase our affection for each other. Private devotion is not to be selfish devotion.

5. *Pecuniary relief should be administered to those who need it.*

"Distributing to the necessities of the saints," Rom. xii, 13. How just and forcible is the inter-rogation of the apostle, 1 John, iii, 17, "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? Let it not be imagined that *public* contribution release the members from the exercise of *private liberality*. They ought rather to be considered

mere earnest of all that more effective and abundant liberality which they should exercise in secret. The shilling a month given at the Lord's supper, seems to be considered by some as a release from all further obligation to provide for the comfort of their poorer brethren, a kind of composition for the full exercise of religious charity.

6. *Forbearance is a great part of love.*

Forbearing one another in love, Eph. iv, 2. The strong must bear with the infirmities of the weak. Christians of great attainments should not despise or ridicule the feeble conceptions of those who are babes in Christ; but most meekly correct their errors and most kindly instruct their ignorance: this is love. We often find things in others which endanger our communion with them. Some are forward and obtrusive, others are talkative, others indulge a complaining, whining, begging, disposition; others are abrupt almost to rudeness. Now here is room for the exercise of love. Are we to love only *amiable* Christians? Perhaps after all, in the substantial part of religion, these rough characters far excel others, whom courtesy and amiableness have carried to the highest degree of polish. We are to love these individuals not on their own account, but for Christ's sake, to whom they belong; not for their peculiarities, but in spite of them. We are sometimes called to love those whom few but God himself can love, and this is the strongest evidence and greatest triumph of brotherly love. If you had the picture of a valued friend, would you throw it away, because there was a spot on the canvass, which in some degree disfigured the painting? No; you would say it is a likeness of my friend still, and I love it notwithstanding its imperfection. The believer is a picture of your best Friend, and will you discard him, because there is a speck upon the painting?

7. *Love should induce us to watch over one another.*

I do not mean that church members should pry into each other's secrets, or be busy bodies in other men's matters.—1 Thess. iv, 11; 1 Peter, iv, 15. Much less are they to assume authority, and act the part of proud inquisitors. But still we are to "exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Can we indeed love any one, and at the same time see him do that which we know will injure him, without entreating him to desist?—Gal. vi, 1.—The admonition to "warn the unruly," 1 Thess. v, 14, was delivered to private christians. From the striking words of God to the Jews, Lev. xix, 17, we see, that not to rebuke a brother when he sins is to hate him.*

I am aware that this is a difficult and self-denying duty, but that cannot excuse its neglect. This Cain-like spirit is one of the most prevailing defects of christians. Many a backslider would have been prevented from going far astray, if in the very first stages of his declension, some brother, who had observed his critical state, had faithfully and affectionately admonished him. What shame, and anguish, and disgrace, would the offender have been spared, and what dishonour and scandal would have been averted from the church by this one act of faithful love!

II. Church members should cultivate *peace and harmony* one with another.—Eph. iv, 3; 2 Cor. xiii, 11; Rom. xiv, 19.

1. *They should be subject one to another in humility.*—1 Pet. v, 5. From this passage we learn that some kind of *mutual subjection* ought to be established in every christian church. The young should hearken with deference and most reverential atten-

* See my Tract on brotherly reproof, published by the Tract Society, entitled, "The Path to the Bush." Price 2d.

tion to the opinion of the aged ; the poor should be so far in subjection to the rich, as to pay every mark of respect to them. Equals in rank and age should also be subject to each other ; and not determine, at all events, to have their own way, but as far as principle will let them, give up their own views and predilections to the rest.

The democratic principle in our system of church government must not be stretched too far. Liberty, fraternity, and equality, are words which, both in church and state, have often become the signals in the mouths of some, for the lawless invasion of the rights of others. It has been strangely forgotten, that no man in social life has a right to please only himself ; his will is, or ought to be, the good of the whole. He who pertinaciously and selfishly exclaims, "*I will have my way,*" is a rebel against the community.—Phil. ii, 3 ; Rom. xii, 10.

2. To the preservation of peace, *a right treatment of offences is essentially necessary.*

We should be cautious not to GIVE offence. Some persons are rude, dogmatical, or indiscreet ; they never consult the feelings of those around them, and are equally careless whom they please, and whom they offend. They say and do just what their feelings prompt, without the least regard to the consequences of their words and actions.

We should all be backward to RECEIVE offence. An observance of these two principles would keep the world in peace. The passions of some people are like tow, kindled into a blaze in a moment by the least spark. Their common excuse is the delicacy of their feelings. Delicate feelings!! In plain English this means that they are petulant and irascible. I would have their foreheads labelled "*Beware of dogs!*" Had we but patience to wait, or *humility to inquire*, we should find that many *things were done by mistake, which we are prone to*

attribute to design. Let us first ascertain whether offence was *intended*, before we suffer the least emotion of anger to be indulged; and even then, when we have proved that the offence was not committed by accident, let us next ask ourselves whether it is necessary to notice it.

When we have received an injury which is too serious to be passed over unnoticed, and requires explanation in order to our future pleasant intercourse with the individual who inflicts it, *we should go directly to the offender, and state to him, in private, our views of his conduct.*—Matt. xviii, 15. Many persons lock up the injury in their own bosom, and, instead of going to their offending brother, brood over his conduct in silence, until their imagination has added to it every possible aggravation, and they conclude to separate themselves for ever from his society. From that hour they neither speak to him nor think well of him; but consider and treat him as an alien from their hearts. This is not religion. Others, when they have received an offence, *set off to some friend*, perhaps to more than one, to tell how they have been treated. The report of the injury spreads further and wider, exaggerated and swelled by those circumstances which every gossip chooses to add, until it comes round to the offender himself in its magnified and distorted form, who now finds that *he* in *his* turn is aggrieved and calumniated; and thus a difficult and complicated case of offence grows out of what was at first very simple in its nature and capable of being adjusted.

We ought always to close our ears against the complaints of any individual who would inform us of the fault of a brother before he has told the offender himself. Sometimes when persons have received a supposed offence, *they will endeavour to gain information from others in a circuitous and clandestine manner*, in order, as they think, to con-

duct the affair with prudence. This is crooked policy, and rarely succeeds. Great caution should be observed as to the spirit in which we go to the offending brother. All the meekness and gentleness of Christ should be in our temper and manner. Every feeling, look, and tone of anger should be suppressed. We should not *at once accuse* our brother of the injury, for the report may be false, but modestly ask him if it be correct. All attempts to extort confession by threatening should be avoided; and nothing should be employed but the appeals of wisdom, the gentle persuasions of love. If we succeed in this private interview to gain our brother so far as to produce a little relenting, we ought to cherish, by the kindest expressions, these beginnings of repentance, and to avoid all demands of unnecessary concession, all haughty airs of conscious superiority, all insulting methods of dispensing pardon. "Brother," we should say, "my aim was not to degrade you, but to convince you; and since you see and acknowledge your fault, I am satisfied, and from this moment shall forgive and forget it."

If the offender should refuse to acknowledge his fault, and it should be necessary for us to take a witness or two, which is our next step in settling a disagreement, *we must be very careful to select men of great discretion and calmness; men who will act as mediators not as partisans.* It is absolutely necessary, in order to offences being removed, that the offender, upon his being convicted of an injury, *should make all suitable concession;* and it will generally be found, that in long-continued and complicated strifes, *this obligation becomes mutual.* Whoever is the original aggressor, a feud seldom continues long ere both parties are to blame. Even the aggrieved individual has something to concede, and the way to induce the other to acknowledge his greater offence, is for him to confess his lesser one. "Confess your faults one to another."

We should be very cautious *not to exact unreasonable concession*. A revengeful spirit is often as effectually gratified by imposing hard and humiliating terms of reconciliation, as it possibly could be by making the severest retaliation.

When suitable acknowledgments are made, the act of forgiveness is no longer optional with us.—Eph. iv, 26, 27. The word revenge should be blotted from a christian's vocabulary, by the tears which he sheds for his own offences. How can an implacable christian say, "Forgive me my trespasses as I forgive them that trespass against me?" How strong is the language of Paul.—Eph. iv, 30, 32. What motives to a forgiving spirit! An *implacable christian* is a contradiction in terms.

The last step in reclaiming an offender, is *to bring him before the assembled church*.—Matt. xviii, 17. Every effort that ingenuity can invent, affection prompt, or patience can conduct, ought to be made before it be brought to be investigated by the brethren at large. If every trivial disagreement be laid before the church, it will soon become a Court of Common Pleas, and have all its time consumed in adjusting matters of which it ought never to have heard.

An offence ought never to be considered as removed until love is restored. A mere cessation of actual hostilities may do for the intercourse of the world, but not for the fellowship of the saints.

When once an offence has been removed, it should never be adverted to in future. Its very remembrance should, if possible, be washed from the memory by the waters of oblivion. Nor should *we*, when in our turn we are convicted of an error, shelter ourselves from reproof, by reminding our reprover that he was once guilty of a similar offence. This is *mean, dishonourable, unchristian, and mischievous*.

Every christian should bear reproof with meek-

ness. Few know how to give, still fewer how to bear, reproof, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness." How small is the number who can adopt this language in sincerity! What wounded pride, what mortification and resentment are felt by many when their faults are told to them. The Scripture is very severe in its language to those who turn with neglect, anger, or disgust, from the admonitions of their brethren. "He that hateth reproof is brutish"—Prov. x, 17; xii, 1; xxix, 1.

There is a very interesting description of the manner in which private offences should be treated, in that excellent book, "Social Religion Exemplified;" a book which every professing Christian ought to read, and which, having begun to read, he will never lay aside till he has finished it. Part of a dialogue I here transcribe, as showing the manner and spirit in which this very difficult matter ought to be managed:—

"*Neophytus.*—If Epenetus please, and with the good leave of the company, I would further request a brief account of *private offences*, that probably occurred among these professing brethren.

Epenetus.—I shall then gratify my young friend, which I am persuaded will not be ungrateful to the company.—Upon a time, in some discourse which Egwan (of whom you have heard something before) and one Hyderus had, wherein they differed in opinion, the latter told the former that he was an insignificant fellow, whose thoughts were not to be regarded. Egwan said in answer, that he took it very ill of him. The other replied, You may take it as you please. So their conversation ended in a cloud. Egwan had but little rest that night. Is it so then, he says to himself; and yet did Christ redeem me? Did the Spirit of the Lord visit my heart? Did the church of Christ receive me? And must I (though weak and feeble) be called insigni-

nificant? Tossed through the night in much uneasiness, he thought to go in the morning to one of the elders to complain. He got up, and (as usual) in the first place committed himself to God: but while he was at prayer, mourning over his present uneasiness, that word came into his mind, 'If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.' He quickly saw that it was not his immediate business to divulge it to any body, no, not to an elder; but to go directly to the brother who gave him the offence. Accordingly he desired God to give him meekness of wisdom from above, and to bless his design. So he went to Hyderus, and spoke to him as follows:—

Egwan.—Brother, I have had a very uneasy night; you spoke, I think, very unadvisedly with your lips, to say no worse of it; you have grieved me much, and surely you have sinned against God. I have judged it my duty to come, and have some talk with you about it; and have mentioned it to none but the Lord. You know you called me in disdain, an insignificant fellow. Pray, what do you think of the expression, and of the spirit in which it was spoken?

Hyderus.—Truly I think it was not worth your while to come to me about it. I charge you not with pride; yet pray does it not look very much that way, that you should make it your business to come hither to prove yourself valuable and significant?

Egwan.—I came with no other design than to tell you my grievance. For if I am such a person as with disdain you described me, then am I not regarded by the Redeemer; have no portion in him, nor doth his Spirit dwell in me; nor hath he ever taken notice of me; otherwise, sure, I should be entitled to a place in the esteem of his children. *Why did the church receive me? You have cen-*

sured the whole church and its elders, as well as myself.

Hyderus.—I do not pretend to justify what I said; but think you greatly aggravate it; whereas you might as well have been easy without taking any notice of it.

Egwan.—And suffer the sin to lie upon you? Brother, nothing is desired but repentance for sinning against God. I hope I am willing to think meanly of myself, but am not so willing that any thing appertaining to the Redeemer's kingdom should be treated with derision or disdain.

Hyderus.—Dear brother, I disdain you not; you discover yourself to be a christian of good improvement. I am sorry to have so sinned against God and you, and desire that brotherly love and tender respect may continue.

Egwan.—Amen; I am satisfied, dear brother.

Christophilus.—What a speedy, happy end was put to this offence. Oh, what endless strife of tongues, evil surmisings, animosities, and popular clamour, spring and prevail in some places for want of observing such a method as this!

Neophytus.—But what if Egwan had gone to the elder first, as he thought once to do?

Epenetus.—Why then he would have been re-proved for taking such a wrong step; would have been better informed and sent about his business.

Neophytus.—But what if Hyderus had justified himself, and persisted in his sin?

Epenetus.—Then Egwan must have taken another opportunity, and desired a brother or two to go along with him; that they might use their joint endeavours to bring the offender to repentance."*

2. If the peace of the church be preserved, *the members must repress a tattling spirit.*

* I have treated this subject more at large in a Tract entitled, "The Olive Branch and the Cross," Price 6d.

There are some persons so deeply infected with the Athenian passion to hear or tell some new thing, that their ears or lips are always open. By a singular perversity of disposition, those who love to talk about the circumstances of others, rarely ever select their *excellencies* as matters of discourse, but almost always fix upon their failings; and thus to borrow a simile of Solomon's, they resemble the fly, which neglects the healthful part of the frame to pitch and luxuriate on the sore.

In case of tattling, there are generally three parties to blame—the gossip, the person listening to the report, and the person who suffers his mind to be irritated by what he hears, instead of going, in the spirit of meekness, to require an explanation from the original reporter.

Let it be a rule with every church member, to *avoid speaking of the circumstances, and especially of the faults, of others.* We should beware of saying any thing, which by the perverted ingenuity of a slanderous disposition, may become the basis of a tale to the disadvantage of another. It is not enough that we do not originate a report, we ought not to circulate it. When it reaches us, there it should stop, and go no farther. We must never appear pleased with the tales of gossips and news-mongers, much less with the scandals of the back-biter; our smile is their reward. If there were no listeners there would be no reporters.

Let us avoid and discourage the hollow, deceitful practice of indulging a tattling disposition, under the cover of lamenting over the faults of our brethren. Let our lamentations be poured out before God and the offender, but to none else.

Others again indulge this disposition by running about to inquire the truth of a report which they say has reached them respecting a brother. There are cases in which a modest disclosure of the failings

of others is necessary. Such for example, as when a church is likely to be deceived in the character of an individual whom it is about to admit to communion. In such instances, the person who is aware of the imposition that is likely to be practised, should go directly to the pastor and make him acquainted with the fact: instead of which, some persons whisper their suspicions to any and to many, except the pastor. It is perfectly lawful also to prevent any brother from being betrayed into a ruinous confidence in pecuniary matters, by informing him in confidence, of the character of the individual by whom he is about to be deceived. Silence in such cases would be an obvious injury. Be slow to speak then, is a maxim which every christian should always remember.

III. Besides these things there are duties which members owe to the church in its *collective* capacity.

1. They are bound to take a deep interest in its concerns, and to seek its prosperity by all lawful means.

Some members take no concern in the affairs of the community which they have selected as their religious home; if members are added, they express no delight; if none are admitted, they feel no grief; they fill up their places at the table of the Lord, and in the house of God, and beyond this, seem to have nothing else to do with the church. This is a most criminal apathy.

2. They are bound to attend all the meetings of the church, at least so far as their circumstances will allow. They had better be absent from sermons and from prayer-meetings, than from these.

3. They should most conscientiously devote their gifts, graces, and abilities to the service of the church, in an orderly and modest way; neither obtruding their assistance when it is not required, nor withholding it when it is solicited.

Some have the gift of prayer ; some have penetration and sound judgment. Persons of large and respectable worldly connections may often use their influence with great benefit to the temporal affairs of the society.

And then how many wise, judicious, holy men are there in our churches, who might be most honourably and usefully employed in reading the Scriptures, sermons, and tracts in the houses of the poor. Persons of respectable circumstances in life especially, should thus employ themselves ; as their situation gives them greater influence. Females may also properly be thus engaged. I am astonished that means of usefulness so simple, so easy, and so efficient, are not more generally employed. In this age there is a great danger of allowing the system of lay preaching to be carried to a most mischievous extent. Many who have no other qualifications for the pulpit than their boldness in adventuring into it, are each sabbath employed in this manner, to the edification of none, and to the scandal of many. Every pastor should exercise a salutary control and discretion in this matter.

4. In large churches situated in great towns, members living in the same district should hold social meetings for christian fellowship, converse, and prayer.

5. It is due to the authority of the church that every member should cordially submit to its discipline ; for without this, order would be destroyed, and the reign of anarchy introduced.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO THE MEMBERS OF OTHER CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES.

I. In those cases when the churches are of a different denomination,

1. We should respect their religious opinions and practices. They act conscientiously, and whatever is done at the dictate of conscience, is too sacred to be made the matter of ridicule. The way to bring the scorn of ungodly men upon all religion, is for religious people, differing upon minor points, to jest with each other's practices. Baptists and Independents especially should bear these remarks in mind.

2. Let us avoid religious bigotry and prejudice. With some christians, the consideration that a man is not of their party, is sufficient in their evil eye, to dim the lustre of an example which angels admire! I know not a proof of true piety more decisive, and more pleasing, than that quick perception and fervent admiration of the beauties of holiness, which lead a man to recognise and love them, wherever they are seen, whether in his own denomination, or in others.

"The evil to be deplored in the present state of the church is the unnatural distance at which christians stand from each other, the spirit of sects, the disposition to found their union on the wood, hay, and stubble of human inventions or disputable *tenets*, instead of the eternal rock—the faith once delivered to the saints. Surely, surely, we shall

find a sufficient bond of union, a sufficient scope for all our sympathies, in the doctrine of the cross. In their zeal for their distinctive peculiarities, the various denominations have too much forgotten the sentiments they hold in common, and in their endeavour to hold fast the principles of their own form of ecclesiastical polity, have suffered themselves to forget that they all belong to one general community. The evils resulting from separation have not been sufficiently felt or deplored; for separation, though in some cases necessary, and a matter of enlightened conscience, is still an evil as to its consequences, where, as is too often the case, it gives rise to prejudice and bigotry. The fault of separation must of course lie with those who impose, or *attempt* to impose, terms that render it necessary; but the bigotry and prejudice which spring from it, often lie with both parties. The great aim of all parties should be to concede the right we claim for ourselves, and to believe that there may be, and are, men as conscientious and as holy, who differ from us, as we are ourselves."

3. We should abstain from all officious controversy, and under-hand proselytism.

There are some, who having fixed their envious eye on some individual whom they wish to gain over to their party, tease him with conversation, supply him with books, and in short, have recourse to any means and any instruments to effect their purpose. He may be holy in his conduct, happy in his mind, useful in his station; and therefore they cannot plead his deficiency of holiness, comfort, or usefulness, as the ground of their efforts. Nothing can be more despicable than such conduct, except the habit of appealing to the feelings of *young converts*, and persons under religious *impressions*, and wheedling them away by the insinuation that they can never expect peace of mind or

growth in holiness, while they remain in their present connexion. Let us never imitate the conduct of these spiritual kidnappers. It is a far more honourable and useful kind of zeal, to convert sinners into christians, than christians of one name into christians of another name.

II. I speak also of the conduct of christians to the members of other churches of their *own* denomination.

It is sometimes the case that where two or more churches of the same denomination exist in a town, a most unhappy, unscriptural, disgraceful temper is manifested towards each other. This is peculiarly the case where two churches have been formed by a schism out of one. Oftentimes has the feud been bequeathed to the generation following. And are these churches of saints! Thus churches quarrel, to find sport for the devil and his children. Deep, indelible shame on such societies! If two rival physicians, who had each as much as he could do, when the plague was raging in a town, looked with envy and grudging on each other's success, what should we say of their spirit?

There should be a spirit of mutual affection between the members of different churches; they should avoid, when they meet in their social circles, all invidious and uncharitable reference to the others. It is too common for the christians of one society to make the circumstances and faults of those of another the leading topics of conversation, and thus the coals of strife are kindled in these *christian* parties. All comparisons between the talents of the ministers, and the respectability of their churches, should be carefully abstained from.

It is not unusual for the pulpit to be converted into a source of adulation, which to say nothing of *its littleness*, is exceedingly injurious. If a church is in a state of spiritual prosperity, let them be

thankful, but not vainglorious. "Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."

Church members should never resent by coldness, and distance of behaviour, the conduct of those who leave their society to join another in the same town. I have known cases in which both the minister and his flock have refused even the civilities of ordinary intercourse to those who have left their church to associate with another. This is a most pitiful and unchristian disposition.

There are duties to be performed by the church in its *collective* capacity, towards other societies of the same denomination.

1. We should own them as churches of Christ ; cherish the most friendly and fraternal feeling towards them, and hold christian communion with them, in all the duties of our common faith and practice. Rom. xvi, 16 ; 1 Peter, v. 13 ; 1 Thess. iv, 9, 10.

2. We should receive their members when recommended to us, and freely grant honourable recommendations of our members to them. Rom. xvi, 1 ; 2 Cor. viii. 23, 24.

3. We should co-operate with neighbouring churches for promoting the spread of the gospel, either by local or general institutions. Many objects of vast importance to the spread of the gospel in the world, can be accomplished by the *union* of churches, which cannot be effected without it. Union is power. United fires brighten each other's blaze, and increase each other's intensity. Brotherly love, as well as zeal, is cherished by such unions ; one great end of the assembling the Jews three times a year before the ark, was to keep up a brotherly feeling between the different and distant parts of the nation.

4. We should be willing to give and receive *advice* in cases of difficulty and importance. Of

course the independence of the churches, and the right of private judgment, should be vigilantly watched, and sacredly preserved. But *advice* does not imply control. The dread which has been felt of the simple act of one church's asking the advice of a neighbouring minister, or an association of ministers and deacons, in cases of extreme difficulty, discovers a fear of domination which is perfectly childish. How reasonable and common is it for two parties in a state of litigation to ask the opinion of a third; or for one individual in difficulty to solicit the advice of another. How much benefit would result to our denomination if this simple and rational method of taking counsel in times of difficulty were adopted by our churches. The Congregationalists in the United States, have standing councils for this purpose, whose advice is asked in the election of ministers.

5. We should take a deep interest in the welfare of other churches, and in a suitable manner express our sympathy, and afford to them our assistance. We should, at our church meetings, remember in prayer the cases of such as are in affliction; and in the event of the death of a pastor, how consoling would it be to a bereaved church to receive letters of condolence from neighbouring societies.

Most effectual help may be rendered by one church to another by pecuniary assistance granted from such as are wealthy to those who are poor. Acts xi, 29, 30; 1 Cor. xvi. 1. How great would be the effect produced if a church in its *individual capacity*, were from year to year to send a donation to some poor community in its neighbourhood. How would this lovely display of christian feeling endear the societies to each other! The comfort of many faithful and laborious ministers would be thus promoted, and the kingdom of Jesus Christ enlarged.

Many of our churches are withering for the want of a little of that wealth which others could spare, without lessening the comfort either of their minister or their families. The christian who should spend two thousand a year in this way, may give *forty pounds a year to fifty churches*. What a wholesale way of doing good would this prove !

CHAPTER IX.

THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS IN THEIR PECULIAR CHARACTER AND STATION.

I. THE pastor's wife.

As a wife she should be a bright pattern of all that tender affection, that unsuspicious confidence, that cheerful obedience, that undivided devotedness to her husband's comfort, which such a relationship implies; a lovely, spotless exhibition of connubial virtue.

As the female head of a family, she should direct her household affairs with judgment, and be a model of order, neatness, and domestic discipline. It is required of *him* that he should rule well his own household; but in this he is dependent upon his wife.

If a mother, she should strive to excel in every maternal excellence. When ministers' children are talked of for ill behaviour, much blame must attach to the *mother*. In her own personal character she should be distinguished by PIETY and PRUDENCE. Her piety should not only be sincere, but ardent. She should be the holiest, most spiritual woman in the church. Her prudence should equal her piety. She should be very careful not to make her husband dissatisfied with the situation he occupies. She should consult his *usefulness*, and be willing to live wherever this is promoted. She should be careful not to prejudice his mind against any individual who may have, designedly or unintentionally, injured her. Some pastors' wives instead of acting

as a screen, to prevent these petty vexations from reaching his ear, have rendered their tongues a conductor to convey them to his bosom. They should hide many things of this kind which it is not important he should know, and soften others, of which he cannot be ignorant. In all cases when her husband is the object of a supposed or real injury, a minister's wife should be very cautious how she acts. She should govern her own spirit, and endeavour rather to mitigate than exasperate his displeasure. She should never betray the confidence reposed in her by her husband.

Prudence is to be displayed in all her conduct *towards the church*. Probably the chief part of this virtue lies in a proper government of the *tongue*. Let it be an invariable rule with her TO SPEAK ILL OF NO ONE. She should never appear fond of receiving ill reports from others. Let her never betray a secret which she has been compelled to receive, nor become umpire between two contending parties. She should avoid as much as possible the appearance of favouritism. Her friends should be such as by the common consent of the society, would be allotted to her. She should maintain a dignified, though not a proud consciousness of her station, blended with the greatest affability and affection. Her dignity should prevent the highest from being obtrusive, her kindness should make the lowest feel that she is accessible. Without being a busy body, she should make the interests of her friends her own. Her advice and assistance should always be granted when asked, but never distributed in a way that would render it unwelcome and little valued. Over all institutions which have been formed in the congregation with a more direct reference to the relief of female necessities, she ought to preside *with wisdom, meekness, and zeal*. Her influence *should be discreetly exerted in forming the general*

and pious habits of the younger females. She should be the friend of the poor, and be often seen in the sick chambers of those of her own sex. With so much to engage her attention, she will have little leisure for visits of useless show, or expensive intercourse. She is the wife of a man whose master is God, whose business is the salvation of souls, whose scene of labour is the church of Christ, and the consequences of whose exertions, whether they succeed or fail, are infinite and eternal; let her act accordingly.

II. The deacons.

The institution of the deacon's office arose from a seemingly accidental circumstance which occurred in the church at Jerusalem, Acts vi. The first deacons were simply the almoners of their brethren. They dispensed the charities of the rich for the relief of the poor; and this, whatever has been added to the office by the usages of the churches, must still be considered as its permanent duty. What a lovely and attractive view does this give us of the genius of Christianity! Where shall we find any thing analogous to it in other systems?

The Church of England has imitated the Church of Rome in the total alteration of this office, and has made it exclusively a lower grade of what is called the priesthood; the deacon being altogether a spiritual functionary, at least in practice. Abuses of this office, however, are not confined to the Churches of Rome and of England. The deacon in dissenting communities has sometimes been in spirit and pretensions almost as distant from the deacon of apostolic times as the deacon of the Vatican. Hence it is that in some cases the unscriptural plan of committees has been resorted to, in order that the tyranny of *lord* deacons might be avoided.

I do beseech those who bear this office to look to its origin, and learn that it is an office of service.

which gives no authority, or power, or rule, in the church, beyond the special work for which it is appointed, and that is, to provide for the comfort of the poorer members of the redeemed family. The ordinary additions to the duties of the deacon, such as providing for the Lord's table, and the minister's support, taking the superintendence of all temporalities, and assisting by counsel and other modes of helpfulness the pastor in his varied duties, I admit to be wise and proper. They are, however, extra-diaconal, and are vested in the individual, merely for the sake of utility, and by the law of custom.

This is not to exhibit the officer in a meagre and degrading point of view, for what can be a more happy or honourable employment than to distribute the alms of the brethren, and visit the habitations of the poor, like angels of mercy, with words of peace upon their lips, and the means of comfort in their hands. A faithful, laborious, affectionate deacon, must necessarily become the object of justly deserved regard in the church. He will move through the orbit of his duty amidst the prayers and praises of his brethren, and in measure may say with Job, chap. xxix, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16.

While for the sake of expediency, all the temporal affairs should be confided to the hands of the deacons, still in all but what relates to the distribution of the alms of the church, they ought to render a most faithful account, even to the last farthing of property, to the brethren. The utmost fairness and openness should ever be manifested by those who manage the temporalities of religious societies. There must be no keeping back accounts, no refusal to surrender their trusts; but every thing to give satisfaction, and to inspire confidence.

Deacons should remember that *all* the qualifications specified by the apostle—1 Tim. iii, 8-13, *should be found embodied, as much as possible, in*

each individual holding the office, and not, so to speak, shared between them.

The deacons, from their being officers in the church, although their office is of a secular nature, and from their being generally acquainted with the affairs of the society, will be considered by every wise and prudent minister as his privy council in his spiritual government, and should be always ready to afford him, in a modest, respectful, and unobtrusive manner, their advice. They must not however dictate. A good deacon should be his minister's helper without being his master; his friend without being his partizan; his counsellor without being his dictator, and his advocate without being his flatterer.

In the transactions of church business, the deacons should expect no other influence than that which arises from the esteem and affection in which they are held by the people. The wisest opinion, if delivered with the dogmatism of official pride, will often be resisted, merely because it is attempted to be *imposed*.

III. Heads of families.

1. Your primary duties of course relate to your children. Let your first, and deepest, and most lasting solicitude be for the formation of their *religious* character, and the *salvation of their souls*. Let this guide you in the choice of schools where they are to be educated; the families in which they are to be apprenticed. Act so as that they may clearly discern that your most anxious concern is that they may be truly pious. Let them hear this expressed in your advice and prayers, and see it manifested in all your arrangements. There appears to me to be at the present moment a most criminal neglect on the part of christian parents of the religious education of their children. Every *thing is sacrificed* to the lighter and more frivolous

accomplishments of the female character, and to the literary and scientific acquisition of boys. Religion with many is quite a secondary matter; but ought it to be so? That christian who would carry on a system of religious education with success, should enforce it with all the commanding influence of a HOLY EXAMPLE. Let your children have this conviction in their hearts,—“If there be but two real christians in the world, my father is one, and my mother is the other.”

Family prayer should be performed with great punctuality, constancy, and seriousness. It should neither be intruded on by business in the morning, nor by sleep in the evening. It should be conducted with the most solemn devotion, and never rendered tedious by extreme length. It should be very simple, and have special reference to the case of the children and servants. Heads of families should rarely sup from home.

Professing christians should resist the entrance of worldly conformity into their families. If it be the aim of a christian to approach as nearly as possible to the manners of the world without actually being numbered with its votaries, his children will be restrained with difficulty on the right side of the line of demarcation, and be perpetually longing and trying to push onward. When a worldly temper has crept into the circle of a christian church, piety retires before it, and the spirit of error soon enters to take possession of the desolate heritage.

How comes it to pass that our churches are so much built up by accessions from worldly families, and so little from the families of the professors of religion? How? Because of the all but total neglect of the religious education in the so called *christian* households, or because what little semblance of piety is there maintained is all counteracted by a prevailing and criminal worldly-minded-

ness. Too many parents wish to devolve all the religious instructions of their children upon the pastor, and look for their conversion, if indeed they can be said to look for it at all, from his sermons, rather than from their own pious, judicious, and persevering labours at home. Yet how can they expect even *his* most impressive ministrations to be effectual for this purpose, when there is such a counteracting influence always exerted within the domestic circle. It is altogether a mistake, an inversion of the right order of all things, to look for the salvation of the souls of the children which are found in our pious families, from the pulpit of the preacher; this should be effected by the blessing of God upon the endeavours, and prayers, and example of the parents, and there is no doubt that this would be the case if parents were what they ought to be. Our parental church members generally, in all denominations, are in a low and lukewarm state: and piety, if it ever revive, must begin to revive in the families of our flocks.

Another duty devolving on heads of families relates to *their servants*. They should manifest a kind solicitude for the temporal comfort, and especially for the spiritual welfare, of their servants. In every respectable habitation, there should be a kitchen library, comprising a few plain, interesting, moral, and religious treatises. Great care should be taken to afford them opportunities to attend public worship. And why are servants so often detained from public worship on the Sabbath morning? Tell it not in Gath, because they are kept at home to *cook a dinner for the parlour*. Yes, there are professing christians who will not forego the gratifications of the palate, though it be to aid in saving their servants' souls!!

IV. Servants. There is no class of church members, for whom I feel more anxious, than for domestic

servants. Cut off in a considerable degree from pastoral attentions : urged forward in a course of labour which in many cases has no intervals of rest ; often most cruelly deprived of the repose of the Sabbath ; it is difficult indeed for them to keep up the power or enjoy the consolations of personal religion. *They* have peculiar need to watch lest the flame of piety should languish and expire in their hearts. It is quite interesting to observe how particular the apostle is in his directions to servants, Eph. vi, 5—7 ; Col. iii, 22—25 ; Titus ii, 9—10.

It is to servants that the solemn and striking admonition is addressed, "to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." A servant should make the interests of the family her own, and act in all things towards her master's property as if she were its possessor. The apostle has laid uncommon stress upon servants being uniformly the same for fidelity, and honesty, and diligence, whether in the *presence* or *absence* of their employers. I scarcely know one character in the private walks of life, that has a fairer opportunity to glorify God, than a religious servant in an ungodly family. It will be a fine testimony to the excellence of piety, when we shall hear even irreligious masters and mistresses generally say, "We will never have, if we can help it, any but pious servants, for we have seen that piety renders them faithful, humble, diligent, and trustworthy"—1 Tim. vi, 1, 2. Servants who have believing masters, should remember that though by the law of Christ they are brethren, this does not destroy their superiority as masters. It is no uncommon thing for professing servants to give themselves such airs, to manifest such a degree of consequence, and to expect so much deference, as to *make their religion*, or rather their want of it, a *source of disgust and uneasiness*. The means of *grace* ought to be valued and improved, but the

occasional and unavoidable loss of them, should not be attended with the destruction of the christian temper. It would be well if servants on entering upon a place, were to have an understanding with their employers, on the subject of their attendance at public worship. That servant cannot really seek *first* the kingdom of God, who for the sake of higher wages would go into a place, which excludes all enjoyment of the Sabbath, and the house of God, and almost all opportunities of private prayer. It is not creditable to a servant to be often changing place. It would be honourable to her profession to be distinguished for neatness rather than gaudiness of attire. It would be better for her to lay by a portion of her wages for a time of need, than to spend it in finery.

V. Young persons.

These should flee youthful lusts, and be very cautious to abstain from vanity and self-conceit. They should be seen at the church meetings, but very rarely heard. In forming matrimonial connections they should resolve to "marry only in the Lord." For a christian to engage the affections of a female, and then abandon her, is dishonourable in the extreme, and brings great reproach on the cause of God.

VI. Rich members.

It is true our churches do not abound with such persons; probably there never was a period when nonconformity owed so little to the patronage of title or wealth as it does at the present moment. The cause of dissent is progressive, however, in the middling classes of society, and thus bears at least one feature of resemblance to the cause of Christianity itself during its first ages, which went on from conquering to conquer, not only without, but against, the smiles of the great. We do not despise *the riches of this world*, but we can do without

them. Enough of wealth we have to build our temples, educate our ministers, and propagate our religion; more it is true we could employ, but if those who have it withdraw our resources, we must renew our liberality, and make them feel that we can do without them. There are among us some who delight to lavish their fortunes in supporting the cause they love and espouse. The erection of chapels, the support of seminaries, the maintenance of poor ministers, the establishment of churches, should with them be an object of deep anxiety. From the admonition of Paul to Timothy, 1 Tim. vi, 17, 18, we gather that rich christians ought to be far more anxious to lay out than to lay up their fortunes. There appears to me to be yet wanting a *proportionate* liberality on the part of the rich. Their efforts bear no comparison with those of the middling classes and of the poor. Such persons should avoid all unnecessary worldly conformity, and all extravagant modes of living. Their example in this would do incalculable good. It becomes them to be exceedingly attentive to the wants and comforts of their poorer brethren, 1 John iii, 17. Especially should they be very cautious not to assume undue power in the government of the church. The distinctions of wealth have no place in the kingdom of Christ. The vices to which the rich are more particularly exposed, and against which they should vigilantly guard, are pride, haughtiness, love of money, idleness, self-indulgence, luxury, worldly conformity, ecclesiastical domination, and oppression of the poor. The virtues they are called to exercise, are gratitude to God, humility and condescension to men, economy, temperance, and liberality, together with tender sympathy for their poorer brethren, and a generous regard to the support of the cause of pure religion, protestant nonconformity, and general benevolence.

VII. The poor.

Contentment with such things as they have, and an unmurmuring submission to the appointments of providence, are obviously their duty. They should watch against an envious spirit. "Grudge not one against another." They should be conspicuous for their industry, 2 Thess., iii, 10-12. They ought not to look for any pecuniary allowance from the society while able to provide for themselves and their family. The religion of Jesus Christ was never intended to establish a system of religious pauperism. The only times in which members should feel that they have claims upon the funds collected at the Lord's supper are, when sickness has entered their dwelling, when age has incapacitated them for labour, or when the produce of their industry is too scanty to procure the necessary comforts of life. The poor should not be exorbitant in their expectations of relief; and they should be particularly careful not to manifest an encroaching and begging disposition. *Cleanliness* is a very incumbent duty of the poor. The credit of religion often depends on little things, and this is one of them. The poor should not expect too much familiarity from their superiors. Our relationship in the church, does not destroy our distinctions in the world. In all the meetings of the church, and in the transactions of the church business, the poor should manifest a peculiar modesty of deportment. They should listen with deference to the opinions of those who have more knowledge than themselves, and without sacrificing the right of private judgment, should be much guided by the views of others.

VIII. Tradesmen.

A christian tradesman must guard against a worldly spirit. The men of this world should be constrained to say of him, "This man is as attentive to business and as clever in it as we are, but we can perceive in all he does an inflexible regard

to principle, an invariable reference to religion. We can discover no lack of diligence or prudence but it is perfectly evident that his heart and high hope are in heaven. He is neither so elated by prosperity, nor so depressed in adversity, as we are. He has some secret source of happiness of which we are not possessed; and his eye is upon some standard of action which we do not recognise. "He is a christian as well as a tradesman." The present mode of conducting business is exceedingly perilous to piety, and it is high time to return to the sound principles of christian morality. A christian should beware of *excessive speculation*, and take for motto, Phil. iv, 8. He should be very watchful against those artifices, violations of truth, and unfair advantages, which many resort to in the disposal of their articles.

No prevalence of custom can make that right which in itself is wrong. The standard of a christian's morality is the Bible, and whatever is opposed to that, he must avoid and abhor. A christian tradesman should be most eminent for justice, truth, honour, and generosity in all his dealings. "I know nothing of that man's creed," said a person of religious tradesman with whom he dealt, "because I never asked him what he believed; but a most honourable, punctual, generous tradesman I never met with in my life. I would as soon take a word for a thousand pounds, as I would another man's bond for a shilling. Whatever he promises he performs, and to the time also." This is adopting the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things. It is very dishonourable when a christian tradesman is actuated by a spirit of envy and jealousy towards others, and when he employs ungenerous means to prevent their success. Others have as much right *to live where they like*, as we have; it is their word *as well as ours*: and to employ our wealth in a

case to ruin them, by underselling, is a spirit perfectly incompatible with the genius of religion. It is quite obvious that a tradesman ought to regulate his expenditure by his income. The man that lives beyond his resources is guilty of a felony, for which he is answerable, if not at the bar of man, yet certainly at the tribunal of God.

Never was there an age in which it was so difficult as in this to maintain the consistency of the christian character, and yet to be a diligent and successful tradesman. A friend of mine, in conversation with a professor of religion, heard him speak of an action which was not in accordance with the whatsoever things are true, and just, and honest, et cet., and said to him, "Does that square with religion?" "Oh," said the other, "what has religion to do with business?" Such a man, whatever was his profession, plainly proved that *his* religion was *only* profession. If men do *not* carry their religion into business, it is because they have none to carry.

CHAPTER X.

MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS.

PRINCIPLES OF RELIGION AS CONTAINED IN THE DECLARATION OF FAITH AND ORDER SET FORTH BY THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION.

"1. The Scriptures of the Old Testament, as received by the Jews, and the books of the New Testament as received by the primitive christians from the evangelists and apostles, Congregational churches believe to be divinely inspired, and of supreme authority. These writings, in the languages in which they were originally composed, are to be consulted, by the aids of sound criticism, as a final appeal in all controversies ; but the common version they consider to be adequate to the ordinary purposes of christian instruction and edification.

"2. They believe in one God, essentially wise, holy, just, and good ; eternal, infinite, and immutable in all natural and moral perfections ; the Creator, Supporter, and Governor of all beings, and of all things.

"3. They believe that God is revealed in the Scriptures, as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that to each are attributed the same Divine properties and perfections. The doctrine of the Divine existence, as above stated, they cordially believe, without attempting fully to explain.

"4. *They believe that man was created after the Divine image, sinless, and in his kind perfect.*

"5. They believe that the first man disobeyed the Divine command, fell from his state of innocence and purity, and involved all his posterity in the consequences of that fall.

"6. They believe that therefore all mankind are born in sin, and that a fatal inclination to moral evil, utterly incurable by human means, is inherent in every descendant of Adam.

"7. They believe that God having, before the foundation of the world, designed to redeem fallen man, made disclosures of his mercy, which were the grounds of faith and hope from the earliest ages.

"8. They believe that God revealed more fully to Abraham the covenant of his grace; and having promised that from his descendants should arise the Deliverer and Redeemer of mankind, set that patriarch and his posterity apart, as a race specially favoured and separated to his service; a peculiar church, formed and carefully preserved under the Divine sanction and government, until the birth of the promised Messiah.

"9. They believe that, in the fulness of the time the Son of God was manifested in the flesh, being born of the Virgin Mary, but conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit; and that our Lord Jesus Christ was both the Son of man, and the Son of God;—partaking fully and truly of human nature, though without sin,—equal with the Father, and 'the express image of his person.'

"10. They believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, revealed, either personally in his own ministry, or by the Holy Spirit in the ministry of his apostles, the whole mind of God for our salvation; and that by his obedience to the Divine law while he lived, and by his sufferings unto death, he meritoriously 'obtained eternal redemption for us;' having thereby vindicated and illustrated Divine justice, '*magnified the law,*' and brought in everlasting righteousness.'

"11. They believe that after his death and resurrection he ascended up into heaven, where as the Mediator he 'ever liveth' to rule over all, and to 'make intercession for them that come unto God by him.'

"12. They believe that the Holy Spirit is given in consequence of Christ's mediation, to quicken and renew the hearts of men; and that his influence is indispensably necessary to bring a sinner to true repentance, to produce saving faith, to regenerate the heart, and to perfect our sanctification.

"13. They believe that we are justified through faith in Christ; as 'the Lord our Righteousness,' and not 'by the works of the law.'

"14. They believe that all who will be saved were the objects of God's eternal and electing love, and were given by an act of Divine sovereignty to the Son of God; which in no way interferes with the system of means, nor with the grounds of human responsibility; being wholly unrevealed as to its objects, and not a rule of human duty.

"15. They believe that the Scriptures teach the final perseverance of all true believers to a state of eternal blessedness, which they are appointed to obtain through constant faith in Christ, and uniform obedience to his commands.

"16. They believe that a holy life will be the necessary effect of a true faith, and that good works are the certain fruits of a vital union to Christ.

"17. They believe that the sanctification of true christians, or their growth in the graces of the Spirit, and meetness for heaven, is gradually carried on through the whole period during which it pleases God to continue them in the present life; and that at death, their souls, perfectly freed from all remains of evil, are immediately received into the presence of Christ.

"18. They believe in the perpetual obligation

of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: the former to be administered to all converts to Christianity and their children, by the application of water to the subject, 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;' and the latter to be celebrated by christian churches as a token of faith in the Saviour, and of brotherly love.

"19. They believe that Christ will finally come to judge the whole human race, according to their works; that the bodies of the dead will be raised again; and that, as the Supreme Judge, he will divide the righteous from the wicked, will receive the righteous into 'life everlasting,' but send away the wicked into 'everlasting punishment.'

"20. They believe that Jesus Christ directed his followers to live together in christian fellowship, and to maintain the communion of saints; and that for this purpose they are jointly to observe all Divine ordinances, and maintain that church order and discipline, which is either expressly enjoined by inspired institution, or sanctioned by the undoubted example of the apostles, and of apostolic churches.

PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH ORDER AND DISCIPLINE.

"I. The Congregational churches hold it to be the will of Christ that true believers should voluntarily assemble together to observe religious ordinances, to promote mutual edification and holiness, to perpetuate and propagate the gospel in the world, and to advance the glory and worship of God, through Jesus Christ; and that each society of believers, having these objects in view in its formation, is properly a christian church.

"II. They believe that the New Testament contains, either in the form of express statute, or in the *example and practice of apostles and apostolic*

churches, all the articles of faith necessary to be believed, and all the principles of order and discipline requisite for constituting and governing christian societies; and that human traditions, fathers and councils, canons and creeds, possess no authority over the faith and practice of christians.

“III. They acknowledge Christ as the only Head of the church, and the officers of each church under him, as ordained to administer his laws impartially to all; and their only appeal, in all questions touching their religious faith and practice, is to the Sacred Scriptures.

“IV. They believe that the New Testament authorizes every christian church to elect its own officers, to manage all its own affairs, and to stand independent of, and irresponsible to, all authority, saving that only of the Supreme and Divine Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“V. They believe that the only officers placed by the apostles over individual churches are the bishops or pastors and the deacons; the number of these being dependent upon the numbers of the church; and that to these, as the officers of the church, is committed respectively the administration of its spiritual and temporal concerns—subject however to the approbation of the church.

“VI. They believe that no persons should be received as members of christian churches but such as make a credible profession of Christianity, are living according to its precepts, and attest a willingness to be subject to its discipline; and that none should be excluded from the fellowship of the church, but such as deny the faith of Christ, violate his laws, or refuse to submit themselves to the discipline which the word of God enforces.

“VII. The power of admission into any christian church, and rejection from it, they believe to be vested in the church itself, and to be exercised only through the medium of its own officers.

"VIII. They believe that christian churches should statedly meet for the celebration of public worship, for the observance of the Lord's Supper, and for the sanctification of the first day of the week.

"IX. They believe that the power of a christian church is purely spiritual, and should in no way be corrupted by union with temporal or civil power.

"X. They believe that it is the duty of christian churches to hold communion with each other; to entertain an enlarged affection for each other as members of the same body, and to co-operate for the promotion of the christian cause: but that no church, nor union of churches, has any right or power to interfere with the faith or discipline of any other church, further than to separate from such as, in faith or practice, depart from the gospel of Christ.

"XI. They believe that it is the privilege and duty of every church to call forth such of its members as may appear to be qualified by the Holy Spirit to sustain the office of the ministry: and that christian churches unitedly ought to consider the maintenance of the christian ministry in an adequate degree of learning, as one of its especial cares; that the cause of the gospel may be both honourably sustained and constantly promoted.

"XII. They believe that church officers, whether bishops or deacons, should be chosen by the free voice of the church; but that their dedication to the duties of their office should take place with special prayer and by solemn designation, to which most of the churches add the imposition of hands by those already in office.

"XIII. They believe that the fellowship of every christian church should be so liberal as to admit to communion in the Lord's supper all whose faith and godliness are on the whole undoubted, though

conscientiously differing in points of minor importance; and that this outward sign of fraternity in Christ should be co-extensive with the fraternity itself, though without involving any compliances which conscience would deem to be sinful."

ON THE TRUE NATURE OF CHURCH POWER.

The power of a church is purely spiritual, being simply a right to put their own construction upon the laws of Christ, and to obey his laws in the way which they think will be most agreeable to him.

We sometimes hear about "the rules that *we* have established in our church." Our church!! How came it our's? The church is Christ's. The rules *we* have established!! The sole right of making laws is with him to whom the church belongs. In the choice of officers, in the admission of members, in the exercise of discipline, we are not to act upon views and principles of our own, but are to be guided by those we find in the New Testament. We have no power to *legislate*, but merely to *interpret* the law, and obey. When a member is proposed, we are only to ask, "Is he such an one as Christ has received?" When a measure is submitted for adoption, we are not first to enquire into its policy, but whether it is in exact accordance with the general principles and spirit of the New Testament. Every act of church government must be an explicit acknowledgment of Jesus, as King in Zion, and an act of obedience to his laws. The papacy, the episcopacy, with every other ecclesiastical corruption, may be traced to a want of proper views of the nature of church power.

ON THE SUPPOSED DEMOCRACY OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

It has sometimes been asked under what head of

government that of our churches is to be classed? To which I reply, under none of the species of human domination. The government of the church of Christ is *sui generis*, and is neither to be likened to, nor tried by, any of those systems of authority by which the kingdoms of this world are ruled. It is in one sense an absolute monarchy, since the Lord Jesus Christ is the only sovereign, whose single, absolute, and irresponsible will is law; in another sense it seems, and but *seems*, to be a democracy; inasmuch as though the members are called upon to decide all matters, yet this decision is rather the application of laws already made by Christ, than making laws for themselves; and even this application takes place under the direction of the pastor. It is not denied that there may have existed in certain congregations a species of spiritual democracy which reduces the pastors to the same level as their people; but this is a departure from the principles of the system. *Real congregationalism is not democracy.* It maintains indeed that every separate congregation of believers has the entire power of government within itself; but it does not teach that that power is vested in the private members of the church. It admits and affirms, in common with other systems, that pastors alone are the *rulers* of the church, but it more fully explains the nature, and limits, and extent of this authority, than they. It teaches that pastors are in no sense legislators; that they rule, not by making laws, but by executing those which the Saviour has instituted. It teaches farther, that they are not authorised to execute even *his* laws without the concurrence of the church. Carson, in his reply to Brown, makes a distinction between ruling and judging; the pastor rules, he states, by exhibiting the laws of Christ which bears upon each *separate case* that comes under the cognizance of the church; the people judge of the application of

the law. It may be admitted that this distinction is substantially correct, but the facts of the case may, it is apprehended, be better stated. The pastor rules by explaining the meaning of the laws of Christ and showing their bearing on the specific case before the church, and the flock are bound to the execution of the law thus expounded; unless they can show scriptural ground for another mode of proceeding than the one recommended by the pastor, the proof, as we have seen, being thrown upon them. They must indeed judge whether he has given a right exposition of the law, as well as of its proposed application; still they are not called specifically and officially to sit in judgment, but to give their consent to the execution of a law of Christ. And then the infinite wisdom of the Great Head of the church has provided a sufficient guard against democratic insubordination on the one hand, and priestly domination on the other.*

From hence it is manifest that though the people have a voice in all church matters, still the government of our churches is *not a pure democracy*: which means that the people make the laws, and direct the execution of them, without any official superior or authority to rule over them. But I again repeat, the government of a christian church is perfectly unique, it is a *Christocracy*, in which *he* is the supreme and only legislator; the New Testament is his code of laws; the pastor is his minister to explain and enforce by authoritative persuasion these laws upon the people; while they are to carry the laws so explained and enforced into effect, unless they can bring forward scriptural proof that it is not a law of Christ.

* *Dr. PAYNE's "Church of Christ Considered,"* p. 80, 81.

ON THE VALIDITY OF THE DISSENTING MINISTRY.

It is said to be a part and parcel of the constitution of the Church of England, which has been of late put forth with greater prominence and zeal than ever, by the authors of what are called the "Oxford Tracts," that no man is authorised to preach the Gospel, or administer the Sacraments, who has not been ordained by a Diocesan Bishop, that can trace up by an unbroken line of succession his descent from the apostles. The arrogance and insolence with which this pretension has been insisted upon by the authors of these semi-popish publications is disgusting, not only to those who are the immediate objects of their attack, but to very many members of their own church, who, though they may agree with them in the opinion itself, are more courteous and charitable in their manner of stating it. The sentiment is really so fearful in its consequences, excluding as it does at one fell swoop from the pale of the covenanted church, not only the great body of Evangelical Dissenters and Methodists, but the whole Church of Scotland,* nearly all the reformed churches on the continent, and all the churches of America, except the Episcopalians. What an excision! And the necessary result of this dogma of apostolical succession! No true churches, no true ministers of Christ, where this dogma is not held! The former are illegal associations, treasonable conspiracies against the authority of Christ; and the latter, no servants of Christ, but impious obtruders into the sacred office, thieves and robbers, that have

* Observe here the anomaly of the Queen, Lords, (including the Bishops) and Commons, establishing by law, a Church to be governed by Presbyters, who, not having received Episcopal ordination, are by the canon laws of the realm, declared no true ministers, but unlawful ministers; not merely tolerated, as are Dissenters, but set up, incorporated, by statute.

not entered the fold by the door, but have climbed over the wall!! The very idea is so truly alarming, that it makes one shudder to reflect upon it. I admit that if it be true, we must take it with all its consequences. But how carefully should the evidence of such a doctrine be examined; how full and convincing ought to be the proof, which should lead us to adopt it. Instead of *fulness* of proof, however, there never was a claim so arrogantly put forth, which had so little of even *apparent* evidence to sustain it. This is the position, "no man is a valid minister of Christ, who has not been ordained by a Diocesan Bishop, and can trace up his ecclesiastical office through an unbroken line of similar bishops, to the apostles." It must also be recollected that the Church of England traces its descent through the Romish Church to the Apostle Peter, as Bishop of Rome. Now for the proof of the *entire error* of this doctrine.

1. It rests upon a series of assumptions, every one of which is false; it assumes that Peter was Bishop of Rome—that the Apostles had successors, which, from the peculiarity of their office, they neither had, nor could have—that they ordained Bishops to be their successors, of which there is no evidence—that Bishops are a superior order to Presbyters, which is disproved by Scripture, and denied by the reformers and founders of the English Church.

2. It is not only unsupported by a single passage of the New Testament, but it is in direct and manifest contradiction to its general directions, which make moral and spiritual qualifications the prerequisites for the christian ministry, and not ecclesiastical ancestry. See Matt. vii. 15-23. 2 Cor. vi. 3-10: xi. 12-15. Gal. i. 8-9. 1 Tim. iii. Titus i.

3. It is disproved by the Homilies of the Church of England, which declare the Church of Rome to

be no true church, but "an old, foul, filthy harlot." If it be not a true church, it is no church at all, and its Popes and Bishops are not true ministers of Christ; and how then can it convey valid orders?

4. As a fact, and a question of history, the succession cannot be sustained. Ecclesiastical historians greatly differ, as to the succession—there have been false Popes—and how then can the line be traced, or the succession be supposed to be pure? What a filthy channel is the Poppedom, for holy orders to flow through!

5. If the succession *could* be traced by an unbroken line, what is it worth as to its moral influence? Does the possession of it add to the efficiency of the ministry of those who possess it, or the want of it diminish the usefulness of those who have no claim to it? Have not nine-tenths of all who have been converted to God, lived holy lives, and died happy deaths, been converted without it? Are not laborious and faithful dissenting ministers as useful as those of the Church of England?

It is, therefore, unsupported by a single valid argument. I do not say there are *no* ministers of Christ who contend for it, and who as they suppose have it—but I contend it is not this that makes them ministers, but their call to the work by Christ, and their intellectual and spiritual qualifications. And they whom Christ has called and qualified, and many he has so called and qualified, in other denominations, are as truly ministers of the gospel as they. To declare that *he* is a true minister of Christ, who has been episcopally ordained, though he is false in doctrine, unholy in life, and, incompetent in talent; and he *not* one, who is pious, orthodox, able, zealous, and successful in bringing souls to Christ, is so utterly preposterous, that it is surprising sensible men, and especially good men, can be found to adopt the absurdity.

The dissenting ministry have no need to fear that their flocks will be misled by such a pretension as is set up by the supporters of the apostolical succession.

ON THE MODE OF CONDUCTING CHURCH MEETINGS.

It would conduce to the order of church meetings if it were much inculcated by the pastor, and generally understood by the people, that they were meetings for devotion, and not for debate. They should ever be attended with the usual services of a prayer meeting, and if business is to be done, it should be introduced and transacted in the spirit and amidst the services of devotion. These times of assembling should be periodical, or they will assume the form of business meetings, to which the members come prepared for protracted and general discussion. All the proceedings at a church meeting should either *emanate directly from the pastor*, or from others, by his previous knowledge and consent. An attention to this will very much tend to ensure the order and harmony of our meetings. *As little discussion as is really possible* should take place at our church meetings. Talking assemblies soon become disorderly ones. A wise and prudent minister will set his face against them; and a wise and prudent church will support him in this conduct. It is of course no less the interest than the duty of the society, to support at all its meetings the just and scriptural authority of the pastor. He should never be addressed but in the most courteous and respectful manner, and every expression of rudeness, or insult, should be marked with the disapprobation of the members present.

ON THE ADMISSION OF MEMBERS TO THE CHURCH.

When an individual is known to be desirous of

fellowship, information of this should be conveyed without delay to the pastor, who upon conversing with the person and making suitable enquiries about his character and conduct, must be considered at liberty either to mention him as a candidate for fellowship or not, according as his views shall dictate. No member should bring forward a candidate in opposition to the opinion of the pastor. It is of course to be expected that *he* will never reject an individual but upon grounds which appear to him to be quite sufficient, and which he will without hesitation or reserve communicate to the person himself. On the part of the church there is sometimes a very unscriptural reluctance to receive persons into membership till after they have had a long trial of their christian stedfastness and integrity. Now if Jesus Christ has not stated any time of probation which we must pass through before we are received into the church, what right have *we* to fix upon any? Is it not a direct invasion of his authority? We see in the Acts of the Apostles that the very day on which a man professed himself a christian he was added to the church. In fact his joining himself to the church was his profession. The Lord's supper is intended no less for babes, than fathers in Christ; and who will contend that the right way to treat a new-born infant, is to neglect him and leave him to himself to see whether he will live? The same unscriptural caution is sometimes displayed towards those converts who are young in years. Is there then a canonical age of membership? If not what right have we to speak or think about the *age* of a candidate? Piety is all we have to enquire into; and whether the individual be fourteen or fourscore, we are to receive him, provided we have reason to suppose that *Christ* has received him.

The mode of admission is various in different

churches. On this subject we have no other scriptural guide than general principles.

The *church* is to receive the member, and any mode which they may adopt to ascertain the sincerity of his piety is lawful, provided that it is not so rigid as to deter persons from applying for admission. In some churches the pastor only examines the candidate: but this is too great a power to delegate to any man, and too great a responsibility for any man willingly to incur. In other churches the individuals are examined before the body of the brethren; but this appears to be highly objectionable, for many timid or modest persons would either be deterred from applying at all, or be so terrified as to be unable to say any thing satisfactory. A less objectionable plan is for the pastor and two of the brethren to converse with the candidate in private, and then state their opinion to the assembled church. A written statement of the religious views and feelings of the candidate is often deeply interesting, when it can be obtained in addition to this; but to make it a *sine qua non* of admission, is unscriptural and absurd.

ON DISCIPLINE.

By discipline is meant the right treatment of offending members. The church which neglects this duty resembles a state in which the administration of justice is omitted, and crime is permitted to be practised with impunity. That part of the design of the church union which consists in mutual watchfulness, is lost; backsliders are encouraged to go farther astray, hypocrites are patronised in their self-delusion, the ruin of men's souls abetted, the *society* is corrupted, and the honour of religion is *compromised*. It is this sin which the apostle describes in those awful words, "If any man defile the

temple of God, him shall God destroy." The passage of scripture connected with this appears to me to be generally misunderstood, 1 Cor. iii, 12-15. It has been usual to interpret this passage in reference to doctrines, but I think the true view of it would refer it to persons. The apostle is referring to the church, which he calls the temple of the Lord: now the church consists of *persons*, not of *doctrines*: to defile the church by incorporating improper materials, must consist therefore of adding improper persons to its communion: akin to this must be the sin of keeping such persons in fellowship after they are proved to be unworthy. The advantages of discipline are obvious and numerous. It reclaims backsliders, it detects hypocrites, it circulates a secret and salutary awe through the church, supplies an additional incentive to watchfulness and prayer, by exhibiting at once the most affecting proofs of human frailty, and the painful consequences resulting from its exposure; while in addition, it is a public testimony borne by the church against all unrighteousness.

I. Let us consider what offences should become the subject of discipline.

1. Of course, all scandalous vices and immoralities. 1 Cor. v. 11-13.

2. The denial of essential articles of the christian faith, and persisting in the error. Gal. i. 8. 2 Tim. ii. 17-21. 1 Tim. vi. 3-5. 2 John x. 11. Every church has an indubitable right of determining for themselves what they consider to be fundamental truths; they should, however, be extremely cautious not to set up other terms of communion than those which are established in the Word of God.

3. Disturbing the peace of the church in any way. Titus iii. 10. The word here translated "heretic" signifies rather the author and leader of a party, a factious person. Gal. v. 12. Rom. xvi. 17.

2 Thess. iii. 6. A factious temper, when united with reputed sanctity, is the most dangerous character that can exist in a christian society. A great mistake has been made by some in the supposition that immorality only is a proper subject of discipline; but surely a man whose troublesome and turbulent temper disturbs the peace and breaks the unity of the church is a far more dangerous man than he who has committed sin. In all societies, whether civil or sacred, a man whose conduct disturbs, divides, and does much actually to dissolve the society, ought to be put away. The very end of society is fellowship, and to retain one who actually subverts the very design of association is a monstrous absurdity.

4. Suffering near relatives to want the necessaries of life when able to relieve them. 1 Tim. v. 8.

5. Living in a state of irreconcilable enmity with any of the brethren, and refusing to make suitable concessions for any injury inflicted. Matt. xviii, 17.

II. The *manner of proceeding* in cases of discipline.

There are many things of which no other notice should be taken than the private admonition of one member to another. If this does not produce the desired effect, the pastor should be acquainted with the fact. In most cases the addition of his admonition will be sufficient to produce a spirit of contrition. It must be entrusted to the pastor's discretion to decide what matters shall be brought under the review of the society. If the sin be attended with much aggravation and be generally known, it is his duty to mention it to the church. Should the offender confess the fact and manifest satisfactory proofs of contrition, a simple and affectionate admonition to him to go and sin no more, is sufficient. *The church should be satisfied, and restore him forthwith to their confidence.* But if he be obsti-

nate—if he either deny the charge or palliate his sin,—it would be proper to appoint two or three discreet individuals to enquire into the fact, and to endeavour to bring him to repentance.* At the time the deputation is appointed, a resolution ought to be passed, suspending the individual from the privileges of communion. Time after time he should be visited by the pastor and admonished; and if after one, or two, or three months, he should confess his offence, and discover satisfactory contrition, he should without delay be restored to the confidence and communion of the church. But after waiting a reasonable time, and waiting in vain, for any marks of repentance, the church should proceed to separate him from their communion. His contumacy has immeasurably aggravated his original offence. In some cases where the crime is highly scandalous, and very notorious, it is necessary for the honour of religion, the credit of the society, and the good of the offender, *to proceed immediately to excommunication*, as soon as the fact is clearly proved. By excommunication we mean an entire separation of the offender from all relation to the church whatever, and an utter exclusion from its privileges. The sentence of excommunication should never be proceeded to by the church but with the greatest caution and seriousness; it should be accompanied with sorrowful and humble confession of the delinquent's sin, and earnest prayer that it may have a suitable effect upon his mind, and the minds of others: it should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, and not as an act of the church's own authority: it should have an immediate reference to the ends of church fellowship, and the benefit of

* It is a very wise plan to appoint yearly a Committee of discipline, which should examine all cases that arise, and report to the church, recommending at the same time what course it should pursue.

the offender; it should be unattended by any emotions of wrath, malice, party spirit, or personal resentment; in short from the beginning to the end of the fearful proceeding there should be a manifestation of all that deliberation, discretion, seriousness, grief, and awe which this solemn act of ex-cision seems naturally to demand.

Mr Hall's description of the nature and usefulness of excommunication is very striking.—“I am far from thinking lightly of the spiritual power with which Christ has armed his Church. It is a high and mysterious one, which has no parallel on earth. Nothing in the order of means is equally adapted to awaken compunction in the guilty with spiritual censures impartially administered; the sentence of excommunication in particular, harmonising with the dictates of conscience, and re-echoed by her voice, is truly terrible; it is the voice of God speaking through its legitimate organ, which he who despises or neglects, ranks with ‘heathen men and publicans,’ joins the synagogue of Satan, and takes his lot with an unbelieving world, doomed to perdition.—Excommunication is a sword which, strong in its apparent weakness, and the sharper and the more keenly edged for being divested of all sensible and exterior envelopements, lights immediately on the spirit, and inflicts a wound which no balm can cure, no ointment can mollify, but which must continue to ulcerate and burn, till healed by the blood of atonement, applied by penitence and prayer. In no instance is that axiom more fully verified, ‘the weakness of God is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men,’ than in the discipline of his church. By encumbering it with foreign aid they have robbed it of its real strength; *by calling in the aid of temporal pains and penalties, they have removed it from the spirit to the flesh, from its contact with eternity, to unite it to secular*

interests; and as the corruption of the best things is the worst, have rendered it the scandal and reproach of our holy religion.

“While it retains its character as a spiritual ordinance, it is the chief bulwark against the disorders which threaten to overturn religion, the very nerve of virtue, and next to the preaching of the cross, the principal antidote to the ‘corruptions that are in the world through lust.’ Discipline in a church occupies the place of laws in a state; and as a kingdom, however excellent its constitution, will inevitably sink into a state of extreme wretchedness, in which laws are either not enacted, or not duly administered; so a church which pays no attention to discipline, will either fall into confusion, or into a state so much worse, that little or nothing remains worth regulating. The right of inflicting censures, and of proceeding in extreme cases to excommunication, is an essential branch of that power with which the church is endowed, and bears the same relation to discipline that the administration of criminal justice bears to the general principles of government. When this right is exerted in upholding the ‘faith once delivered to the saints,’ or enforcing a conscientious regard to the laws of Christ, it maintains its proper place, and is highly beneficial. Its cognizance of doctrine is justified by apostolic authority; ‘a heretic after two or three admonitions reject;’ nor is it to any purpose to urge the difference betwixt ancient heretics and modern, or that to pretend to distinguish truth from error is a practical assumption of infallibility.”

We are commanded to withdraw from all religious association with excommunicated persons. They are not however to be utterly forsaken and abandoned. The pastor and members should seek opportunities to admonish and warn them: “peradventure God may give them repentance to the

acknowledging of the truth." 2 Thess. iii. 14-15. 1 Cor. v. 11. Upon their penitence and reformation, they should be again received into communion, with compassion and love, joy and gratitude. No member should be allowed to resign, in order to avoid expulsion. Great care should be taken by a church to display the most inflexible impartiality in the exercise of discipline. We can scarcely conceive of anything more displeasing in the sight of God, anything more likely to bring down his fearful indignation upon a church, than to allow his temple to be defiled, out of compliment to secular distinctions.

**ON THE REMOVAL OF MEMBERS FROM ONE CHURCH
TO ANOTHER IN THE SAME TOWN.**

The slight pretexts on which some persons transfer themselves from one church to another, betrays a frivolity and volatility of mind, which looks like trifling with sacred things. Sometimes a disagreement with one of the members is the cause of secession. Instead, however, of leaving a church on this ground, the Scripture explicitly teaches that we ought to take immediate steps towards reconciliation.

Some persons break their connexion with a church because they think that there are sinful members retained in its communion. Instead of removing, their duty is either by private admonition to reclaim such supposed delinquents, or by informing the pastor, to take the proper measures for their expulsion. If the matter should be brought before the church, and the brethren should not be convinced that there is sufficient ground to proceed to discipline, we ought immediately to acquiesce, and to suppose that through want of information, or some secret prejudice, we had formed an incorrect opinion; and from that time should feel obli-

tably towards the individuals in question. And even if we were persuaded that the church had erred in its judgment, yet as they examined the evidence, and acted upon conviction, it is not our duty to retire. They endeavoured to decide impartially, and as they did not connive at wickedness, their communion is not defiled. Moreover it should be recollected that our fellowship is with the church as a whole, and not merely with the suspected individual member.

It happens not unfrequently that members secede because a pastor is chosen whose election they cannot approve. This forms a difficult case of casuistry. It ought however to be a last resort. We should give a patient and impartial hearing to the minister, and strive by every possible effort to have our prejudices removed. We should not suffer ourselves to be disaffected towards him by circumstances trivial and indifferent. We should not lend an ear to those who have similar views, nor suffer a party feeling to be excited; but acting singly and for ourselves, strive to edify so far by his ministry as to render a secession unnecessary. We should never attempt to prejudice the minds of others, a step which is not unfrequently taken by some to justify their own conduct, but which is attended with more guilt than words can describe.

It is quite unlawful to separate, merely on the ground of dissatisfaction with the decision of the church in its ordinary affairs.

It is equally sinful to retire, because of some imaginary or real offence given us by the pastor. We should go to him alone, but in a spirit of the greatest meekness and respect, on account of his office. The same steps of explanation and reconciliation are to be taken in this case, as in that of a private member.

A member ought not to retire even on the ground

of *supposed* misconduct on the part of the pastor. If his inconsistencies affect his christian character, they should become matter of church investigation ; if they are but imprudences, or the lighter imperfections to which even the best of men are subject, we should be rather disposed to treat them with all reasonable candour, and cover them with the veil of love ; at the same time it might be proper that a respectful and kind exhortation should be delivered to him by the deacons or senior members of his flock.

In cases where a newly married couple are members of two churches, it is quite lawful for the wife to withdraw from her own church to that of her husband, provided she can edify by his minister ; if not, the husband ought not to desire her to accompany him.

If by a removal of our dwelling place, we are situated at an inconvenient distance from the house of God, it is quite justifiable in this case to connect ourselves with a religious society nearer to our abode ; but then we ought to withdraw altogether, and not hear the word preached in one place, and receive the Lord's supper in another. This is destruction of many ends of fellowship. It interferes with pastoral inspection, and interrupts the growth of brotherly love.

Let us then consider that our connexion with a christian church is a bond of a very sacred nature, and which, though not indissoluble, should not be broken but upon some great and rare occurrence.

ON THE PERSONS TO WHOM BELONGS THE RIGHT OF VOTING IN THE ELECTION OF A MINISTER.

The admission of *subscribers*, who are not members, to the elective franchise, has I think been the source of much mischief to our churches. This practice it is plain cannot be defended, except in very

rare cases, on the principles or the precedents of the New Testament. Reason and analogy are opposed to the practice. Nor can *expediency* be pleaded. Nothing can be expedient in church government but what tends to maintain the purity and peace of the society; but does this? I have no question that it is in this way that such numbers of once orthodox places have fallen into the possession of those who oppose the truth as it is in Jesus. The principles of independency are equally opposed to the practice. The subscribers generally outnumber the members, and thus the church might have a minister *forced* upon them in opposition to their own convictions. There may be cases in which it would be prudent to consult the feelings of subscribers; but to incorporate them with the members in the most important act of church business, is confounding things that differ, disturbing the order, and destroying the simplicity of the kingdom of Christ.

ON THE CONDUCT TO BE OBSERVED BY A CHURCH
IN THE ELECTION OF A PASTOR.

When a christian minister is removed, either to his eternal rest or to some other sphere of labour in the present world, the choice of a successor always brings on a crisis in the history of the church of which he was the pastor. No event that could happen can place the interests of the society in greater peril. Distraction and division have so frequently resulted from this circumstance that an argument has been founded upon it, if not against the right of popular election to the pastoral office, yet against the expediency of using it. We must however carefully separate in a system between what is accidental, and what is essential; and if through the infirmity of our nature, some evils of an adventitious kind arise in the administration of a system

clearly founded on reason and revelation, we are no more authorised to subvert the latter on account of the former, than we should be to demolish a hospital, in order to suppress the litigations which arise in its committee, about the direction of its concerns.

Let all the members as soon as their pastor is removed, seriously reflect upon the crisis into which the church is brought, the great importance of preserving its peace, and the influence that their individual conduct may have upon the future prosperity of the society. Let them instantly make it a subject of fervent and constant prayer that the church may be kept in harmony and peace, guided in the choice of a minister, and be enabled to conduct themselves in a spirit of quietness and brotherly love. Each one alone should pray on behalf of himself for the christian temper; and periodical seasons should be appointed when these objects should be recognised, and these desires expressed, by *social* prayer. The choice of a pastor is one of those occasions which render pre-eminently necessary the exercise of that *love* which Paul has so beautifully described in 1 Cor. xiii. This chapter should be devoutly read at every church meeting, together with the hundred and twenty-second, and the hundred and thirty-third Psalms. The business now under consideration will require on all hands the utmost caution, candour, patience, and mutual forbearance.

If LOVE were elevated to the throne of the church, all would go right.

The members should study Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus, to learn what are the qualifications of a christian minister. It appears to me they should unite in their view, *personal edification* and *general benefit*. The benefit of the society at large is the ultimate standard to which private and personal taste must ever give way. Great care should be taken by those to whom the church has delegated

the power of procuring candidates,* not to invite upon probation any individual of whose suitableness they have not received previous and satisfactory testimony.

Let it by no means be thought necessary to wait long after the decease of a pastor, before a successor is elected. When an officer falls in battle, the welfare of the army requires that a successor should be immediately appointed. Neither is it necessary that the church should have a great variety of candidates before an election is made. To set out with the intention of hearing many, in order to choose one, is of all plans the most injudicious and mischievous. As soon as an individual is found who possesses the scriptural qualifications of a Christian pastor, and in whom the great body of the church is united, he should be immediately chosen, even if he be the first that has presented himself. Great caution, however, ought to be exercised in forming a judgment upon the suitableness of an individual. His probationary term should not be too short. Preaching is not the only thing to be judged of. Especial deference should be paid by the younger and inexperienced members of the church to the opinion of their senior and more experienced brethren. All secret canvassing, and attempts to influence the minds of others, should be studiously avoided. To see the mean, petty arts of a contested borough election carried into the church of God is dreadful. It would be well for every church to have a standing rule that no pastor should be chosen, but by the suffrages of two-thirds, or three-fourths, of the members present. It would be well if in every case the church could be unanimous; but this is more than can be looked for. It should certainly be sought for in the use of all proper means. The ma-

* Custom has with great propriety delegated this matter to the deacons.

majority should exercise peculiar *forbearance* and *affection* towards those who are opposed to them, carefully avoiding to impute their objections to any improper motives; listening to their statements with patience; treating them with candour; reasoning with them in the spirit of love, and giving them time to have their difficulties removed. The happiest results have been often the issue of such kind and christian conduct. It would be advisable in some cases, for even so large a majority as two-thirds, or even three-fourths, *to give up the point*, rather than carry it in opposition to a minority which includes in it the deacons and many of the most experienced and respectable members of the society. Persons of property and influence should be very careful how they conduct themselves on these occasions. Let them not assume the office of dictators, nor robe themselves in the dress of Diotrophes. The system of independency admits of influence, but not of patronage; men may lead, but not drive. It unfortunately happens that when one party has given up a minister in compliment to the other, they almost insensibly oppose an individual, who in future may be the favourite of their opponents. It is most sinful to allow the corrupt passions of our nature thus far to prevail in our hearts, as to turn aside our judgment in affairs so sacred and important.

When a minister is at length brought in by a large majority, let the minority endeavour to lay aside their prejudice, and hear him for a season with as much impartiality as possible, well considering the evils connected with separation. On the minister's part much consummate prudence is necessary, and the most conciliatory conduct.

Great credit is due to the minister who has conciliated his opponents, without alienating his friends, and who has become the reconciling medium of two parties, once at variance about himself.

In some cases a division is necessary. When this is unavoidable, great efforts should be made to effect it in *love*. If the two parties cannot unite in peace, at least let them separate in peace. What we want in order to preserve the peace of our churches unbroken, is a more distinct recognition, and a more powerful influence, of *the principles of the gospel*; more humility, spirituality, and zeal for the divine glory. Instead of seeking the good of the whole, the feeling of too many of our members may be thus summarily expressed; "I will have my way." That spirit of mutual submission, brotherly love, and surrender of our own gratification to the good of others, which the word of God enjoins, and our profession avows, would keep the church always happy and harmonious, and enable it to pass in safety through the most critical circumstances in which it can be placed.

ON THE PROPRIETY OF PRIVATELY ADMINISTERING THE LORD'S SUPPER.

The Lord's supper has been sometimes administered to persons who have been long confined to their own habitations by chronic diseases, simply to give them an opportunity of expressing their obedience, and gratifying their love to the Saviour.

I do not consider this proper on the following grounds:

1. The Lord's supper is strictly a *church ordinance*, and not an exercise of mere social religion. All the directions of the apostle concerning this institution are given to the church in its collective capacity; and besides this there are many incidental expressions, which plainly show that this was the view which he took of it, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. 1 Cor. xi, 20; 1 Cor. v, 7, 8. The few individuals who may have assembled with the

afflicted person, constitute not a church, but merely a part of one.

2. This practice is contrary to one of the ends of the Lord's supper, which is to be *a visible sign of the oneness of the church*, of the union of all its members in one body. 1 Cor. x, 17. The bread, or rather "*loaf*," by its unity shows the oneness of the church; by its division into many parts, its many members. But are a few members, assembled in private, detached from the public body, a representation of its *unity*?

3. There is not in Scripture a single instance of any company of christians, whose meetings were merely occasional, and who were not united for the purpose of stated fellowship as a church, in a particular place, observing the ordinance of the Lord's supper. Both example and precept are wanting.

4. As a *precedent*, the practice is dangerous. Further departure from the regulations of the New Testament may be made, till even the purposes of faction shall be promoted by it. It is not enough to justify the practice, to plead the privation of the individual. We must never exercise charity at the expense of principle. Every one confined to his house by affliction is released from all obligation to observe the Saviour's command, "Do this in remembrance of me." All he has to do is to submit to the privation, and not attempt to supply it in a manner unauthorised by the word of God.

ON THE CAUSES OF THOSE SCHISMS WHICH SOMETIMES DISTRACT AND DISTURB THE CHURCHES.

The existence of this evil, truth will not allow us to deny, nor ingenuity enable us to conceal. To the charge of schism, preferred against us with such *inspiration and perseverance* by some, we are as *innocent* as our human being can be to the accu-

sations of another. Such a charge comes with an ill grace from a religious community which, if *separation* be schism, set us the example, by separating from the Church of Rome. I wish the charge of schism from all other quarters were as groundless as it is from the Church of England. Alas, how many of our churches present the sad spectacle of a "house divided against itself." Such scenes, however, ought not to surprise us, though we cannot but lament them. They are evils necessarily growing out of the present imperfect state of humanity. They existed in apostolic times, and do not necessarily disprove the scriptural origin of the system with which they are connected. They are not inseparably connected with the principles of dissent; nor are they so pernicious as the evils connected with the systems of national establishments.

I. Some of the causes of these schisms lie with the minister.

1. *A defective education* is sometimes a cause of uneasiness. He enters perhaps on his academic pursuits with little knowledge of books and of the world. When he has been a student but two or three years, some injudicious congregation, captivated by a few sermons, solicits him to become their pastor. He soon betrays his ignorance and incompetence, and at length by the meagreness of his preaching, and the want of prudence and respectability in his conduct, disgusts his flock, and a conflict ensues. Both parties are to blame; they in tempting him so soon to leave his college, and he in acceding to their wishes. In the present day, college terms ought to be lengthened, rather than diminished. This is an age of activity, more than of study, and therefore a young man should be well instructed at the academy, for he is sure to meet with many interruptions to self-improvement, when he becomes a pastor.

2. In some cases the evil is to be traced to *the want of ministerial diligence*. The time which should be devoted to study, is spent in gossiping or attending public meetings. The people become dissatisfied, perhaps remonstrate in a disrespectful way; the minister takes offence, forms a party and a divided church is the consequence. I believe one half of our church quarrels originate in lazy loitering ministers.

3. Others are *imprudent*. They live beyond their income; or they speak unadvisedly with the lips; or they hastily engage in paper wars with their neighbours; or they marry unsuitably; or they become involved in politics or public business and neglect the interests of the church. In all these and many other ways, do ministers often prepare the way for dissatisfaction or schism.

4. Others are men of *bad temper*: hasty, irascible, petulant, and peculiarly susceptible of offence.

5. Some few are *immoral*. It is a point in controversy which I do not take upon me to decide, how far a minister might go in sin, and yet upon his repentance be authorised to continue his office as preacher and pastor. I am inclined, however, to think that if his transgression has been very flagrant, no penitence, however deep, no reformation, however manifest, can justify him in continuing an office, one qualification of which is, that he who holds it should be "blameless," and "have a good report of them that are without." Peter's continuance in the apostleship after his fall, was an extraordinary case, under Christ's own direction, and can hardly be drawn out into a precedent.

6. The tenacity with which some ministers *retain their situation, when their labours are no longer acceptable to their people*, is another cause of uneasiness. Let all ministers consider how much the peace and prosperity of churches depend on their diligence, prudence, temper, and piety. Let them

tremble at the thought of introducing strife and division to any part of the kingdom of Christ.*

II. Other causes of division are to be found amongst the people.

1. A very large proportion of our schisms arise at the time of *choosing a minister*, which is always a crisis. *A hasty choice of an unsuitable person* to fill the pastoral office, has frequently ended in disturbance.

2. A peculiar and dishonourable *fickleness of disposition* on the part of some churches. They soon grow tired of the man whom they chose at first with every demonstration of sincere and strong regard, and seldom approve a minister beyond a period of seven years.

3. Another cause is the unwillingness of many people *to raise the necessary support of their pastor*. They have seen him struggling with the cares of an increasing family, and marked the cloud of gloom as it thickened and settled upon his brow; they knew his wants, and yet, though able to double his salary and dissipate every anxious thought, they have refused to advance his stipend, and have robbed him of his comfort, either to gratify their avarice, or indulge their worldly-mindedness!

4. An improper method of *expressing dissatisfaction with a minister's labours or conduct*. There are times when it might be proper to remind a minister of some duty neglected, some pastoral avocation overlooked; but if anonymous or insolent letters are sent him, if young, impertinent or dictatorial persons wait upon him, no wonder if he is offended. 1 Tim. v, 1.

5. The *domineering spirit and conduct* of some leading members. Every plan of theirs is introduced, almost with the authority of a law, while no other meets with their support. Little by little

* How pressing is our want of some fund on which such ministers, if without private fortune, should be able to retire.

they endeavour to gain a complete ascendancy in the society, and watch with peculiar jealousy every individual who is likely to become a rival. At length, however, a rival power springs up; a family of growing reputation and influence refuse any longer to submit to the thralldom; opposition to unlawful domination commences, the church is divided into factions, the minister becomes involved in the dispute, and division finishes the scene. Let the leading individuals of our churches, the men of property, and the deacons, consider what mischief may be occasioned by the least assumption of undue influence. Let them watch against the lust of power; let them seek for that humility which can bear to be opposed, and that gentleness of temper which can submit to contradiction. Let them consider themselves as persons whose opinion is to have no other influence than that which its own wisdom gives it; and that the measure of this wisdom is to be estimated not by them, but by their brethren.

6. *The relaxation of scriptural discipline.* Wolves admitted in sheep's clothing will worry and scatter the flock. Many a church has welcomed an Achan to the camp, for the sake of his Babylonish vest and golden wedge. James iv, 1.

7. The existence of an *Antinomian spirit*. "Antinomianism is qualified for mischief by the very properties which might seem to render it merely an object of contempt—its vulgarity of conception, its paucity of ideas, its determined hostility to taste, science, and letters. It includes within a compass which every head can contain, and every tongue can utter, a system which cancels every moral tie, consigns the whole human race to the extremes of presumption or despair, erects religion on the ruins of morality, and imparts to the dregs of stupidity all the powers of the most active poison." **This** ruinous spirit does not always originate

amongst the people. When ministers dwell only on the doctrinal parts of revealed truth, and state these in a phraseology capable of misconstruction; when their preaching is exclusively confined to a few topics, and to a stiff systematic exhibition of them; when a wretched taste for spiritualising and allegorising pervades their pulpit discussions; when the facts and doctrines of the gospel are abstractly stated, without being made the grounds and motives of social duty, and moral excellence; when terms obviously scriptural are avoided in compliment to a system which reprobates, without understanding, them, and their sermons are encumbered and disfigured with the phraseology of a false experience; when believers are flattered and caressed into a high conceit of their peculiar excellence; then whatever be the preacher's tenets or intentions, must Antinomianism be generated and cherished. Hearers who are infected with this heresy, and endeavour to excite a prejudice against a minister by insinuating that he does not preach the gospel, should be reasoned and expostulated with. If they cannot be convinced, they should at least be bound over to keep the peace; but if they persist in disturbing the society, they should forthwith be put away as the troublers of Israel.

8. After all that has been said upon distinct and specific causes of disturbance, it must be admitted that the grand source of ecclesiastical distraction is *the very feeble operation of christian principles on the hearts of church members*. There is one passage of scripture which if sacredly observed would for ever shut out the divider of the brethren. Phil. ii, 1-5. Never until we are brought to a more implicit submission to the authority of Christ, and to a more distinct and practical recognition of the principles of true religion, can we rationally expect to see *Zion a quiet and peaceable habitation*. Heaven itself would be a region of storms, if pride could

enter, or love diminish, in those realms of perfect peace. We must crucify that selfishness which fixes its exclusive observation on our own gratification, and cherish that expansive benevolence which looks upon the good of others. We must contend who shall be lowest, not who shall be highest. We must seek to please, and not merely to be pleased. Let ministers inculcate this temper from the pulpit, and exhibit it in their conduct; let private christians receive the instructions, and copy the example of their pastors. Let both remember that HUMILITY and LOVE are the necessary fruits of our doctrines, the highest beauty of our character, and the guardian angels of our churches.

PRAYER MEETINGS.

These are of great importance both to the piety of individual members, and to the prosperity of the church. There are three parties concerned in them: First—the minister, who superintends and leads them, who should consider them as seasons especially adapted, as well as obviously designed, to cherish the feelings of devotion in his church, and should therefore not only attend them, but do all he can to render them interesting: to whom also it appertains to select proper persons to engage in the devotional exercises. The second party is composed of the brethren who thus engage, and who should observe the following rules:—

1. *Their prayers should be short, not exceeding, on ordinary occasions, more than seven minutes. Long prayers, however excellent they may be, are wearisome, and quench the spirit of devotion. Three prayers of seven minutes each, are far better than two of a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes each. It is of great consequence that this should be attended to; the interest of the meeting depends upon it. Our prayer meetings are ruined by the excessive length of the prayers.*

2. *The prayers should vary.* It is by no means necessary that each should embrace all the topics that are usually brought into our devotions. This is a great error, and ought to be corrected. Let the first who engages confine himself to one or two topics, such, for instance, as personal experience, or the case of those present; let the next enlarge upon the affairs of the church, the minister, the families of the people; let the third take up the conversion of the heathen, and the success of the various institutions set up for that purpose. Let one dwell much on confession of sin; another on thanksgiving for mercies; a third on petition for necessary blessings. A little attention and recollection would render this variety easy to be accomplished, and very beneficial in its influence. The prayers are mostly a continual repetition of the same dull common place expressions. Each good brother thinks he must go on his ten minutes or a quarter of an hour and ekes out his prayer by whatever he can think of. Whereas a gush of fervent feeling of only three minutes' length, would often warm up the hearts of the whole meeting.

3. In *tone* the prayers should be *sufficiently loud to be heard by all, but not so loud as to be unpleasant*; and should be characterised by the deepest solemnity and reverence, and the entire absence of all that is clamorous and imperative.

4. *All poetry* should be avoided in prayers; all hard words, and the frequent repetition of imprecatory epithets; such as, "we beseech thee," "we entreat thee," "be thou pleased," &c.; and the too frequent repetition of any of the titles or attributes of God: and as a general rule, though admitting of occasional exceptions, God the Father should be addressed as the direct object of worship, through the mediation of the Son, and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

5. *When the prayer is obviously coming to a con-*

clusion, it should not *be renewed again* because something else has come into the person's mind which he thinks should have been remembered.

6. The prayers should be in the strictest sense *prayers*, and not *preaching*. A preaching strain is very unsuitable for this exercise. The parts of prayer, and the usual order of these parts, are Adoration, Confession, Petition, Intercession, Thanksgiving. This order should be usually observed; or, if departed from, as it sometimes may, the parts should not be blended in confusion.

The third party at a prayer meeting are those who assemble to join in prayer, not to lead it. No church member who has opportunity to attend, should neglect these seasons of social religion. The advantages of a well conducted prayer meeting are great and numerous. It tends to keep alive the spirit of devotion—demonstrates, by the prayers of so many brethren who engage, the minor varieties, yet prevailing uniformity, of christian experience,—humbles the rich by the holy gifts and graces of the poor—encourages the poor by the sympathies, confessions, and acknowledgments of the rich—cheers the heart of the minister by the kind interest and fervent supplications of his flock—cements the minds of the members,—and may be supposed to bring down the blessings of God upon the church, which is thus united in supplication, and also upon all those varied objects which the church bears before God in believing prayer. Surely then, no one ought to be willingly absent from such seasons as these.

THE END.



